

The Strategic Powerhouse of Partner ABM

How to align your partner
and ABM programs to
accelerate growth

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The strategic powerhouse of partner ABM

In recent years, partner ecosystems and Account-Based Marketing (ABM) have emerged as two essential growth strategies for B2B organizations. ABM, renowned for its effectiveness in winning, growing, and retaining valuable clients, has seen significant adoption and investment. Simultaneously, businesses have harnessed the power of strategic partnerships to extend their market reach and offer more compelling solutions to their clients.

28%

of marketing budgets were dedicated to ABM in 2022¹

71%

of companies said they would increase their spending on ABM in 2023²

Despite their undeniable significance, partner-driven go-to-market (GTM) strategies and ABM initiatives have traditionally existed in separate organizational silos. Even in cases of collaboration between partner and ABM teams, such efforts have typically been ad-hoc responses to specific opportunities or limited-scale pilot projects.

6%

of B2B enterprises have executed collaborative ABM initiatives with their partners³

22%

are currently piloting a joint ABM initiative⁴



¹ ABM Benchmark Study, Momentum ITSMA & ABM Leadership Alliance, December 2022

² ABM Benchmark Study, Momentum ITSMA & ABM Leadership Alliance, December 2022

³ 2023 MPX Survey, Momentum ITSMA, (Coming soon)

⁴ 2022 Channel/Partner Marketing Benchmark Survey, Demandgenreport



However, a paradigm shift is underway, spurred by client demands for heightened synergy among their suppliers. Consequently, the partner ecosystem has assumed unprecedented importance in securing business from strategic accounts. ABM programs must adapt and embrace the pivotal role of partners to fully capitalize on the value of strategic clients.

In this paper, we explore the imperative for B2B organizations to align partner ecosystems and ABM programs and consider the barriers that may hinder this. Drawing on practical insights, industry-leading research statistics, and our comprehensive 10-stage framework for building successful partner ABM initiatives, this provides a roadmap for achieving go-to-market success through strategic collaboration.

85%

of B2B marketers are maintaining or increasing spend on partners and alliances in FY23⁵

deals are **53%** more likely to close when a partner is involved⁷

96%

of tech marketers expect an increase in revenues from their partner ecosystems⁶

72%

believe ABM delivers higher ROI than other types of marketing⁸

⁵ ABM Benchmark Study, Momentum ITSMA & ABM Leadership Alliance, December 2022

⁶ Channel/Partner Marketing Benchmark Survey, Demandgenreport 2022

⁷ State of the Partner Ecosystem, Crossbeam, 2023

⁸ ABM Benchmark Study, Momentum ITSMA & ABM Leadership Alliance, December 2022

Why partner synergy is a must

The pace of progress in aligning partner and ABM programs remains slow, despite the increasingly compelling rationale for doing so.

The complex landscape of large enterprises demands a nuanced understanding, as it entails navigating intricate organizational structures and engaging a diverse array of decision-makers and influencers. In this context, partners become valuable allies, providing a distinct perspective, well-established relationships with stakeholders, and frequently, direct access to senior decision-makers.

Partnerships introduce a rich tapestry of complementary capabilities and expertise, augmenting your core offerings. As you craft highly targeted value propositions tailored to your strategic accounts, these gain greater appeal and distinctiveness as they actively harness your in-house strengths and the valuable resources of key alliance partners.

Businesses and partners are increasingly joining forces to co-create solutions tailored to specific market niches or unique client needs. If you fail to adopt an integrated go-to-market approach for strategic accounts, particularly when marketing jointly developed solutions, you run the risk of client confusion and friction within your sales teams.

Large enterprises wrestle with the intricacies of their operations, seeking streamlined, user-centric solutions from their primary suppliers. In this environment, presenting a unified front with your partners, highlighting a collaborative approach to addressing their critical challenges, resonates more effectively with your audience than messages that narrowly spotlight individual offerings.

Additionally, your alliance partners maintain their own portfolios of top-tier accounts that demand dedicated attention. By engaging in collaborative efforts to unlock opportunities within these domains, you can position yourself as a more strategic partner, fostering deeper engagement and loyalty. This synergy can also lead to more cost-efficient ABM activities through shared investments.

Case study

We worked with a disruptive software vendor struggling to secure meetings with C-level executives, the ultimate drivers of transformative IT investments.

In this scenario, the vendor's breakthrough in several priority accounts came through indirect influence, achieved by collaborating with trusted consultants and systems integrators who held the ears of these influential executives.

The barriers to adoption



Considering its potential for achieving greater success, why is the alignment of partner and ABM initiatives not more commonplace?

There are several barriers:

Organizational friction

Typically, partner-facing teams and ABM teams sit in separate organizational units, with different reporting lines and budgetary control. Existing key performance indicators (KPIs) may not encourage cross-functional collaboration. Often, there can also be lack of clarity when it comes to assigning responsibilities. This means the integration of partner and ABM initiatives may not be clearly defined within anyone's job description.

Process complexity

Both partner and ABM programs maintain their own intricate processes. Many ABM programs are still in the developmental stages, needing refinement. The partner landscape is in a state of rapid flux, leading to continuous evolution in partner-facing processes, such as joint proposition development and GTM planning. Aligning these diverse processes for facilitating joint ABM endeavors can seem daunting, particularly for overburdened managers.

Mindset and culture

For many organizations, effectively implementing an ABM program demands a cultural shift. There are already barriers to break down between marketing and sales, and integrating partners into the mix adds further hurdles.

For example, enterprise sales teams often guard their accounts and may resist relinquishing control by involving partners. Marketing teams may already face difficulties in convincing sales teams of the merits of an ABM approach, and adding partners to the equation can add to these challenges.

Partners themselves may harbor suspicions about a vendor's motives, fearing the vendor seeks only to exploit their relationships rather than fostering genuine collaboration for mutual benefit.

Skills and experience

ABM teams may lack a deep understanding of the partner landscape, including partner identities, value propositions, and motivations. They may also be unfamiliar with building plans that coordinate activities across multiple organizations. On the other hand, partner marketing teams may have limited experience with ABM, meaning they're ill-equipped to engage in meaningful discussions with a partner's ABM team regarding collaborative account targeting.

Conflicting and shifting allegiances

At the account level, you need to address practical issues, as multiple partners often vie for influence with fluctuating degrees of impact.

An initial challenge lies in how you determine how to prioritize among partners. For instance, tech vendors collaborating with systems integrators and consultancies may discover that all their strategic partners have the same enterprise accounts on their target list. You need to decide which partner to engage in each situation, while avoiding damage to relationships with others.

It is essential to manage plans over time, to adapt to changing circumstances. Client needs evolve, personnel change, and the relative influence of partners within a client's organization can shift.

For example, when deciding to collaborate with a specific partner for a particular account based on their strong relationships, adjustments may become necessary if that partner is later replaced by a competitor. Building aligned partner and account-focused plans necessitates ongoing management, not just a one-off effort.

Steps to success

Given the array of challenges that may initially seem daunting, some might question the effort and ask if it's worth it. The answer is twofold:

It delivers results

Our first-hand experience shows the potential that can be unlocked through collaborative partner-driven ABM initiatives.

Deals with a partner involved,
on average close **46%** faster⁹

Case study

We partnered with a leading cloud provider and a system integrator in a joint ABM effort targeting five major banks. The outcome?

A substantial multi-million-dollar contract and increased engagement with decision-makers across all accounts.

It's a competitive imperative

The business landscape is dynamic, and our competitors are likely considering similar strategies. If you fail to align your ABM efforts with strategic partners, you'll have a distinct disadvantage.

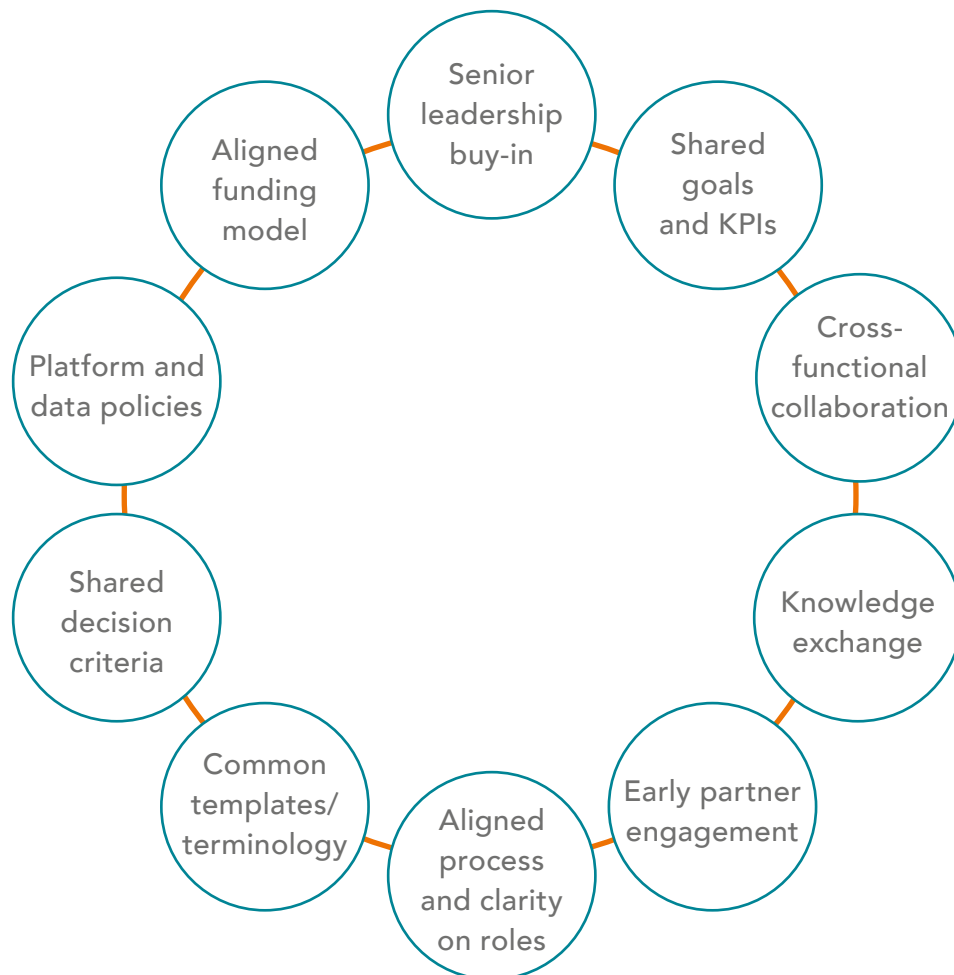
So, how do you move beyond experimentation to establish a scalable approach with significant bottom-line impact?

Drawing from our extensive experience collaborating with ABM, sales, and partner teams, we've identified ten pivotal components for success.

While the specific implementation of your aligned partner ABM program may vary depending on factors like available resources, market positioning, and existing partnerships, this framework applies whether you're an emerging challenger brand or an established industry leader.

⁹ State of the Partner Ecosystem, Crossbeam, 2023

Our Partner ABM Framework



Senior leadership buy-in

Implementing a successful partner ABM program requires a significant degree of organizational and cultural change. This transformation involves challenging established norms, beliefs, and practices within the organization.

Senior leaders across marketing, sales, and partner functions are at the forefront of this transformation. Their alignment and endorsement are the cornerstone of propelling this initiative in a scalable and impactful way.

Although organizations are often resistant to change, with the committed backing of senior leadership, you can intervene when necessary. Without this support, efforts may stall within the complexities of the existing organizational structure.

Shared goals and KPIs

Individuals and teams operating with differing objectives can hinder progress. It's crucial to establish clear, shared goals and priorities that everyone – including senior leadership – can rally behind.

These shared goals encompass objectives such as acquiring new clients, expanding existing client revenues, and strengthening strategic partner relationships. It's important to define the relative importance of these objectives to effectively make decisions and prevent potential roadblocks.

It is vital to measure success based on the three Rs - revenue, reputation, and relationships. The metrics need to be meaningful and quantifiable from both the partner and ABM perspectives.

When determining KPIs, questions may arise about who gets credit for what. For example, when a partner plays a role in a deal handled by the enterprise sales team. In these situations, it's essential to have senior executive support.

Cross-functional collaboration

Building an effective partner-aligned ABM program requires the expertise and commitment of multiple functions within the organization. It should not be an initiative owned by a single department.

To design and implement the right approach for the business, you need to assemble a cross-functional steering team. This team should include key stakeholders from enterprise sales, ABM, partner sales, partner marketing, and revenue operations.

Empower members of this team to make commitments and contribute to group decisions, with shared goals, KPIs, and predefined action parameters.

Knowledge exchange

Effective collaboration between teams is significantly enhanced when team members possess a good understanding of what their colleagues do, the value they bring, the frameworks they use, and the challenges they typically face.

It is highly beneficial to cross-train team members in each others' disciplines. For instance, the partner marketing team understanding the principles of ABM and vice versa fosters a more comprehensive understanding of the goals and functions involved.

Greater common understanding equips the combined team to make better decisions and increases the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Early partner engagement

To initiate a program heavily reliant on partner collaboration, partners should have input early in the process. This proactive engagement significantly boosts the likelihood of success.

Engaging with a select group of strategic partners for top-tier accounts can often be more effective than consulting the entire partner ecosystem. When these key partners are involved in shaping the framework and establishing ground rules for joint ABM initiatives early on, it creates greater buy in and program resilience.

Early engagement allows you to preempt potential issues that may arise later in the process, for example when selecting to work with one partner over another. Difficult decisions will undoubtedly emerge on any individual account. Having open, upfront conversations about these potential challenges, and agreeing some basic principles, such as that client's needs and preferences, will always take precedence and ensures a smoother partnership journey.

Aligned process and clarity on roles

Building upon a foundation of shared goals and common understanding, you should direct your efforts toward aligning processes effectively. This does not mandate a complete overhaul of existing processes but rather identifying connection points and filling gaps with shared processes.

You can achieve a quick win by reviewing existing partner and ABM processes to identify points of intersection. For example, insights and outputs from partner processes should feed into ABM planning and vice versa.

You will likely need to supplement existing processes with new elements that specifically focus on building joint plans with key partners to target priority accounts. These joint plans should function as a sub-section of the overall ABM plan for individual accounts and the overall GTM plan for individual partners. Designing these processes will need to be a cross-functional effort between the relevant departments.

One of the risks associated with cross-functional collaboration is the potential ambiguity regarding ownership of specific actions and decisions. To mitigate this, a clear RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) model for partner-aligned ABM is vital.



Shared decision criteria

At times, the priorities of different stakeholder groups can come into conflict. For example the ABM team may have identified that Partner X has the most influence in a particular account, while the partner team might be heavily invested in Partner Y, who's also targeting the same account. It's crucial to agree in advance on the criteria that will guide these decisions, linking them back to the shared goals and KPIs agreed upon by senior leadership. This depersonalizes the decision-making process and makes it more objective.

Transparently sharing these decision criteria with partners can also help reduce potential conflicts. While it's inevitable that some decisions may not please every partner, understanding the reasoning behind these decisions can prevent lasting damage to the partnership.

Common templates and terminology

Ensuring a degree of consistency in the way information is captured and terminology is used greatly helps the alignment of partner and ABM activities. This consistency minimizes friction and streamlines collaboration.

Adopting a shared approach to structuring value propositions and mapping stakeholders, for instance, simplifies the alignment of information across processes.

Consistent standards within the organization provide a solid foundation for engaging with external partners. This readiness allows you to establish a well-defined blueprint for working together, complete with carefully crafted templates and frameworks. Such preparation instills greater confidence and engagement among partners.

Aligned funding model

Aligning partner GTM and ABM programs often involves juggling multiple budget sources, such as ABM, partner marketing, and Market Development Funds (MDF). Unfortunately, there isn't always an established model for funding allocation in such scenarios.

However, this challenge also presents an opportunity. By aligning these programs, organizations can use existing budget allocations more effectively, potentially creating a multiplier effect for their investments. For example, you could redirect unclaimed MDF toward more productive activities.

To overcome the hurdle of budget allocation, it's essential to secure senior leadership alignment upfront. This ensures that budgets are allocated to generate the most significant impact and prevents individual budget holders from becoming overly protective of their allocations.

Platform and data policies

The foundation of successful ABM initiatives lies in systems that provide insights on accounts, engage them with digital content, track online and offline interactions, and report on progress.

For each account where collaborative work with partners is required, you must decide who will take the lead and which party's systems will be utilized to run the program. Several factors, including existing relationships and roles in the joint value proposition, influence this decision.

Regardless of which party takes the lead, questions will inevitably arise regarding systems access, data sharing, and reporting. Taking the time upfront to address these questions, consult relevant internal teams, and establish internal policies and guidelines will save considerable time and effort when engaging directly with partners on individual accounts.



In summary

As highlighted earlier, both partners and ABM play pivotal roles in driving growth for B2B organizations today. Unfortunately, internal misalignment often hinders their collaboration, and this is no longer sustainable.

In a landscape where ecosystems increasingly shape competitive advantage, leveraging partnerships to secure, retain, and expand top accounts transitions from a 'nice-to-have' to a 'must-have' for forward-thinking companies aiming to outperform the market.

The framework outlined in this paper offers a structured and comprehensive approach to successfully aligning partner and ABM programs, addressing a range of interconnected and, at times, intricate challenges.

At the account-specific level, a different set of questions emerges, spanning strategy, tactics, governance, ownership, and resource allocation. Establishing robust foundations and creating a well-defined framework for ABM, sales, and partner teams simplifies the development and execution of account-level plans, enhancing the prospects of success.

Effective engagement with key alliance partners in ABM initiatives yields substantial benefits for both you and your clients. It leads to improved brand positioning, enhanced innovation, and accelerated growth within your strategic client base. For your clients, it translates to tailored solutions, a seamless experience, and improved business outcomes.

Harmonizing these two growth engines – partners and ABM – unlocks immense potential for acceleration and growth opportunities.

How Momentum ITSMA can make a difference

Momentum ITSMA is the ideal partner to help organizations unlock the advantages of aligning partner ABM programs.

As the pioneers of ABM, we've also helped hundreds of leading global B2B brands win, grow, and retain strategic accounts for market-beating growth.

We provide a range of tailored solutions designed to address the challenges outlined in this paper and construct high-performing programs. These solutions include:

Partner GTM Assessment: A meticulously structured evaluation to help leaders grasp their current capabilities, identify barriers and gaps, and chart a clear roadmap for action.

Partner ABM program design: We assist you in refining and enhancing the processes and frameworks necessary for effective collaboration with partners on top-tier accounts.

Co-creation and joint GTM planning: Through facilitated programs, we enable partners to co-create solutions, construct joint value propositions, and craft collaborative GTM plans.

[Get in touch with Phil Brown](#) and see how our frameworks and tools can help you build your partner ABM strategic powerhouse.