

Using Programmatic Webinars to Achieve Better ABM Engagement

By **John Steinert**, CMO, TechTarget and **Fiona O'Connor**, Content Writer, TechTarget





ABM has become a go-to concept for many B2B organizations, but the success of their programs has been mixed.

That's in large part due to conflicts between the objectives of practitioners, the tactics they deploy and the way ABM really works. In this e-book, we explore why teams struggle with the shifts ABM requires of them and share a methodology by which they can drive substantive success with thoughtful, programmatic implementation of webinar series. As a strategy, ABM is meant to deliver improved revenue performance from as many accounts as possible within a specific account profile. Each account matters a great deal, so real success must be understood in terms of progress with as many of the accounts on the list as possible. This necessarily requires a longer-term outlook and a change in measurement thinking as compared to classical demand generation because the objectives and challenges differ significantly. It also requires adjustment in how tactically similar methods should be conceived and implemented to achieve strategically different outcomes.

Many teams, already familiar with the drawing power of the webinar format, still primarily use them in one-off campaigns focused on collecting leads from broad audiences. So why is that? And how can you get from there to using webinars more effectively in support of ABM's more holistic objectives? In this piece we'll focus on how you can relatively easily evolve your approach to webinars to turn them into a superior engagement vehicle for dramatically improved ABM results.

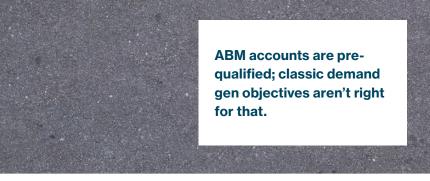




Demand generation wasn't built for this. ABM needs to drive engagement objectives.

When an ABM list is constructed, it represents agreement between marketing and sales that these specific accounts deserve special attention. In launching their ABM program, the teams are making a joint commitment to invest additional resources in these specific accounts because they're looking to realize more revenue from each one of them. In essence, they're pre-qualifying and prioritizing each account on the list as a real revenue opportunity for their company. Now, as a collaborative team, they'll need to do everything possible to become more engaged with those accounts, because without better engagement, more opportunities—the necessary precursors to revenue—can't be created.

With a pre-qualified list in hand, if marketing were to now simply graft its classic demand generation approach onto the program, they'd be shooting themselves in the foot for two reasons: First is that classic demand gen tactics simply aren't designed for deep engagement, so they won't deliver it. Second, since it's



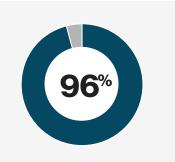
conceived for broad-based lead volumes, demand gen's focus is on aggregate yields rather than performance within specific high-value accounts, and this is nearly the polar opposite of why you're committing to ABM in the first place!

As we'll explain, while certainly great for leads, webinars can deliver audience engagement levels that few other tactics can match. The keys to success in using them for your ABM program lie in overcoming the mindset and operational barriers that stand in the way of a programmatic approach.



Why webinars are so great at driving engagement

Like most professionals, you probably attend quite a few webinars. You may seek out certain topics or experts. You may like the chance to interact with experts directly during live Q&A. You may



find that during the workday, it's an easier way to absorb ideas. Or you may be a person who learns better when you can see people's faces and hear their voices. Any of these reasons and more speak to webinars' ability to draw people in.

96% of B2B buyers say they attend at least one webinar once a month¹.

Educational research has shown that webinars attract audiences well precisely

because they cater to a preferred learning modality versus textheavy formats. The fact is that, two-thirds of buyers are multimodal learners², meaning they rely on multiple information formats. Their preferences shift depending on the situation, for example: what's going on in their day and what it is that they're trying to learn.

Source: 1. BrightTALK Benchmarks Report 2021, 2. Vark, 3. BrightTALK Benchmarks Report 2021



Done well, a webinar has no problem engaging large audiences for 45 minutes or more. They can be In a survey of users, BrightTALK found that 69% of buyers reported watching webinars and/or

videos when researching

a purchase³.

scheduled asynchronously and augmented with subtitles for audiences in multiple time zones around the world. They provide room for detailed explanations or multiple perspectives and flexibility for things like audience participation that written formats struggle to match.

For their impact and capability end-to-end across most go-tomarkets, the benefits available from webinars strongly suggest that every team should develop a high level of comfort in delivering them.

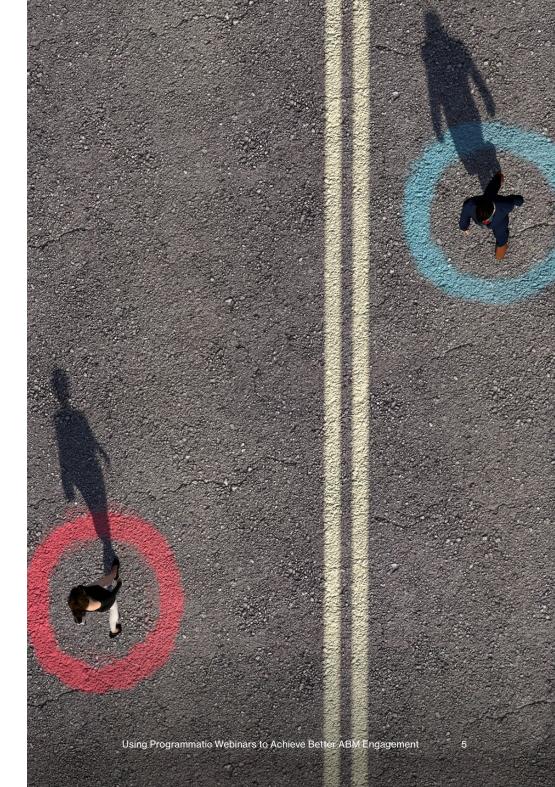


Don't stop at ad hoc

Today, most marketing teams are using webinars to drive leads in an on-again, off-again, ad hoc and tactical fashion. They know that the format works for leads, so they feature it in their mix. But teams commonly don't really think of the impact webinars have as a deep engagement vehicle, and they rarely conceive of them as a cornerstone of their strategy for a particular audience. These realities can actually serve to inadvertently raise two potential barriers to successfully leveraging the format for ABM objectives.

When webinars are developed as 'just another tactic,' teams tend to execute and think of them as one-among-many deliverables – a small part of broad campaigns to relatively unqualified audiences. In this context, tasks like selecting a strong topic, identifying speakers and promoting the show can make webinars seem difficult as compared to the other tactics in use. As a result, many teams do relatively few webinars – they shy away from webinars no matter how well they serve an audience's needs. This is obviously not good for marketing outcomes, but these teams simply haven't figured out how to deliver webinars with relative ease.

To get out of this low-engagement simplicity trap and truly take advantage of the account engagement webinars offer, teams need an approach that allows them to organize differently–we call it "programmatic," because instead of treating webinars as single tactics, we think of them as part of a larger whole–a more strategic program with very specific ABM objectives.





A thought experiment regarding efficiency and effectiveness

If we examine two typical logistical scenarios for practitioners, the engagement superiority of webinars becomes abundantly clear.

Scenario A:

6 Infographics x 50% consumption x 5 minutes **= 15 minutes of engagement**

Many teams consider infographics a relatively easy tactic and asset to create. They're also popular with certain audiences so they might seem like an ideal format to use in your ABM mix. Now assume you're able to create one of these a month (pretty good), but how much engagement do you really get?

Let's say you do 6 infographics to a particular target persona over 6 months. If you're lucky, your best prospects consume 3 out of the 6. And let's say it takes them 5 minutes to read each one. You get 3 responses ("leads") per person and 15 minutes of total engagement with them over 6 months. It's not a lot of time for them to form a positive opinion of you or your solution.

Scenario B:

- 4 webinars
- x 50% consumption
- x 45 minutes = 90 minutes of engagement

Assuming that you're building your infographics to target the right audience and to share expertise relevant to your areas of specialty, the same inputs provide a credible foundation for a webinar. If your standard infographic requires at least 3 strong data points and 3 discussion sections, some expert elucidation or discussion would be the only necessary content adds.

Sure, you'll need to secure presenter talent, you need a deck (much like creating the infographic itself), and you need to promote. But even if you reduce the number of executions from 6 to 4, the engagement time is 6X more per responder from webinars. Imagine how much stronger a connection that achieves! We've found over thousands of these scenarios that show it's well worth the modest additional effort. And you can always repackage the webinar material into infographics, e-books, and more to get even more leverage on any given idea.





In contrast to physical events, webinar programs are easier to develop and less risky.

B2B audiences have always liked in-person events because they're an opportunity to network with peers and gain a lot of industry insights in a compressed, intensified timeframe. Likewise, marketing and sales teams see value in in-person because of the excitement around them and the potential to make a more human connection—to interact with buyers face-to-face. In many ways, physical events are attractive because of the potential they create for meaningful engagement. While a webinar or a webinar series can only mimic the very best engagement you might hope for from a physical event, webinars can greatly reduce the cost per event, the risk associated with sponsoring or putting it on, and your ability to scale outcomes more easily by repeating it to different audiences at additional times. To help you think about this objectively, the chart on the next page lays out a reasonable comparison between physical and virtual events (webinars).



7

Figure 1. Comparing the physical to the virtual

| | Physical Event | Ad Hoc Webinar | Programmatic Webinar Series |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|
| Objectives | AwarenessNew leadsOpportunity acceleration | AwarenessLead genOpportunity acceleration | Awareness/consideration Lead gen Opportunity yields over time and acceleration |
| Engagement | Up to 30 mins 1:1 on the floor Potential for positive peer-to-peer interaction Potential for additional meeting time or casual after-hours interaction | 30-60 minutes of virtual interaction with audience Potential for 1:1 Q&A interaction Potential for positive peer-to-peer interaction | Multiple sessions of 30-60 minutes of virtual interaction with audience Multiple chances for 1:1 Q&A interaction during and between sessions Multiple chances for positive peer-to-peer interaction |
| Cost per engagement | \$10K-\$100K (\$200-\$500 cost per engagement at 200 leads) Cost is high and varies depending on location, length, audience size and event type | \$1K-\$20K* per session (< \$100 per engagement at 200 leads) Small cost associated with webinar, e.g. webinar hosting platform, ads, etc. *cost of paid expert talent | \$6K (as low as \$5 per engagement) Planned for scale, logistics become much easier each time Attendees who attend more sessions become more likely opportunities |
| Production difficulty | High Must identify/create presentation themes, topics, collateral etc. All speaker and event logistics including promotion May leverage existing field marketing team with high carrying cost | Medium Must identify/create presentation themes, topics, collateral etc. All speaker and event logistics including promotion No dedicated team, so hard to build expertise | Low (per session) Can be "operationalized" as teams become comfortable using planning frameworks All logistics can be systematized and prepared far in advance |
| Risk | High Both fixed (in-house staff) and variable costs are at risk if the event doesn't deliver Abundant "uncontrollables," like weather, competitive activity, illness, etc. | Medium Risk varies with spend If the topic, promotion or performance fail, the event fails Some follow-up opportunities to repurpose materials into other executions | Low Risk is low in part because cost and production difficulty are low The ability to adjust future webinars based on learning gained early in the program reduces risk/enhances potential reward |



Designing a webinar program that drives ABM engagement

ABM success comes from breaking through with as many of the relevant people in an account as possible. That way, more people in the account have definite awareness and knowledge of your solution such that they're far more likely to consider you when they have a need. Likewise, it gives your salespeople much more visibility into an account and many more access points as they work to uncover active opportunities and develop new ones with these buying centers that your program has engaged. By engaging more people at the account more deeply, your ABM program is preparing the ground for increased revenue success.

Programmatic webinars—webinars that share a theme and are run consistently—have a cumulative effect in an account over time. They engage more people over time and each one more deeply. As such, they deliver on both the need for identifying currently active buyers and for paving the way to better access for future opportunities.

Operationalizing programmatic webinars becomes much easier when a team establishes a thematic framework to guide them as they pursue engagement with their target accounts. We've developed this approach within our own BrightTALK organization.

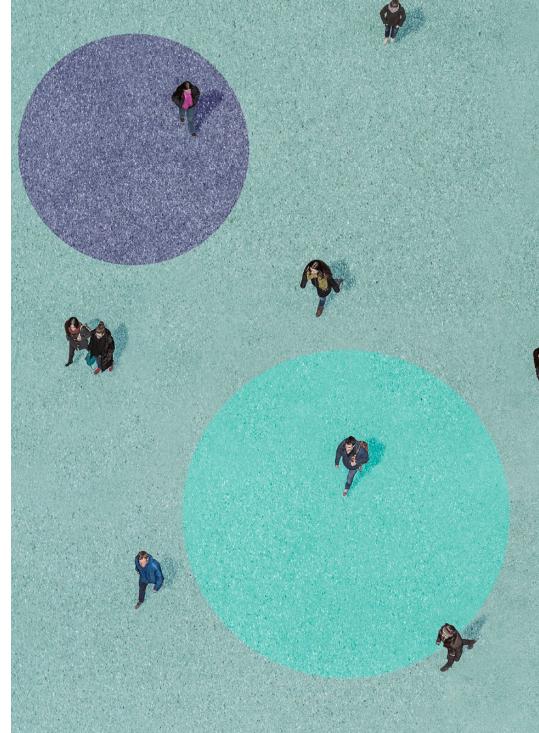




It has enabled us to efficiently build and deliver more than 27,000 webinars⁴. Obviously, it's made doing webinar programs much easier-talk to an expert today about how we can help your team.

Figure 2. Programmatic webinars deliver high engagement more effectively than other approaches





Source: 4. BrightTALK Benchmarks Report 2021



10



A program to draw in accounts and the different buying centers within them

In order to sell more to an account, you need to be able to differentiate both your company and its offerings to a variety of different personas. Furthermore, in most cases, your solutions will appeal to different members of the buying team for different reasons, and perhaps to entirely different buying centers. To build your program efficiently, you'll want to have a good balance between the granularity necessary to distinguish yourself with these target audiences, without having to go too far. You're trying to open doors here, not close the deal.

Foundational elements of a program

Planning: Given that any ABM list comprises of a group of very important target accounts, you're not likely to give up on them after a few attempts. And since that means you're likely to keep trying for a period of time, there's a real incentive to structure your approach, so that you can better manage it as it rolls out, measure it as you go, and adjust if need be. Simply put, you'll want to develop an ABM plan. Programmatic webinars utilize the same approach. Targeting your ABM list, you'll want to take stock of where you are today, where you want to be from an engagement perspective at the end of the year, and what you'll need to accomplish with specific personas to get you there. When you start by looking at the strategic end goal, it's then a simpler assignment to work backwards to identify what elements you should include in the program to get there.

Theme: Viewed as a whole, your webinar program should have a theme that can strongly position you and your solutions relevant to needs held in common across accounts on your target list. Not too unlike a Netflix series that appeals to a particular segment, you can think of your program as a binge-worthy offering (and as you build up your inventory of webinars you've done live, that is, in fact, how they will continue to support your objectives as on-demand recordings). The theme is like the cover of a book or an umbrella under which the rest of the material resides.

Series threads: Because your solution(s) may appeal to different buying centers and certainly when the personas you need to attract are very different, you'll want to consider further subdividing your program into 'series threads' that go deeper on particular topics or areas for specific sub-groupings of people based on their functions or roles.



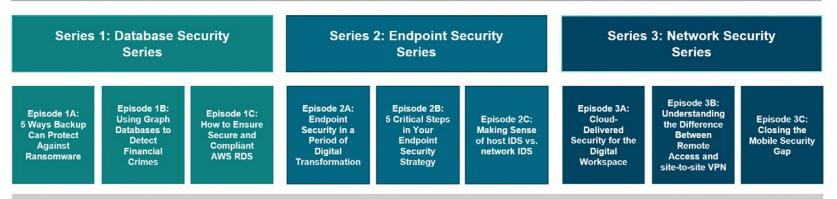
Episodes: With your theme and series structure in place, you can then decide on the minimum number of episodes that you should create. The key here is to balance what you could do and what you really have to do at a minimum to deliver your end goal. You'll want to try to create what's necessary to get your key differentiating points across – moving the audience from what they think today to what you want them to think about their issues, your company, and your solution offerings moving forward. Each episode should both stand on its own as a useful deliverable for a potential customer and be an enticement that keeps them looking forward to future installments of useful information from your team.



Figure 3. Building out an ABM webinar program

Here is a sample programmatic webinar framework conceived for a security software company that sells in three solution categories. Using TechTarget data, they have identified an overarching theme and three different series underneath it aligned to their solutions. Their plan is to run their series in semi-parallel fashion over six months, so that any single individual could view all nine episodes if they wanted to.

Theme: Securing Your Company's Critical Infrastructure



Episode topics are planned based on the most popular editorial content being consumed by accounts on the ABM list.



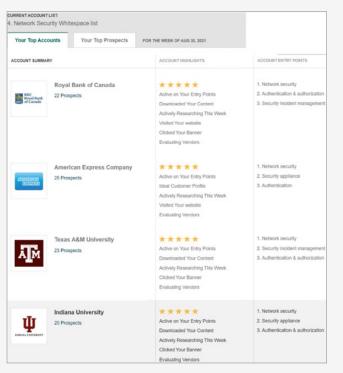
Purchase intent insights help ensure quality webinar outcomes

Engagement efforts (whether demand gen or ABM) live or die based on the relevance of your content to your prospects' needs. When you've got generally sound insight into their needs, your assets may pull pretty well on average. But it's when you know who's actually in market and can leverage that in your content and outreach that conversion to opportunities really takes off. Consultation with TechTarget market experts, our BrightTALK Central webinar platform, and our real purchase intent data combine to enable you from the planning of your webinar program, to the building of its elements, to its optimization as it rolls out. For example, by monitoring your target accounts in our Priority Engine[™] intent data platform, you can learn the exact solutionspecific themes most relevant to the accounts or subgroupings of them within your target account list. And inside those accounts, Priority Engine will tell you exactly which people (their full contact information, role and function) are active on a buying team and exactly what solution-relevant topics they care about.

Figure 4. How Priority Engine intent data supports webinar programs

In this example, we're showing three Priority Engine views (also available within a CRM) of the Network Security Whitespace ABM list from a vendor who sells Network Security, Cloud Security and Database Security software solutions. Since new logos are a high priority, we could choose to do a webinar series focused specifically on Network Security alone.

 A. In this view, we're looking at the top-ranking most active accounts – those whose buyers journeys are already highly developed. In the center 'highlights' column, you can see their existing engagement activities. And in the column on the right, you can see their interests. It's this right-most column that you should use to help plan your episodes.





B. Now we're clicking to Indiana University specifically to take a look at the different types of roles and functions – the personas – already present in this buying team. These are some of the specific types of people you want attending your webinars, so you'll want to build content that appeals to them. As you can see, so far, we've only engaged a very technically-focused crowd. We may want to assess whether or not we need to strengthen our content for business executives, Finance or Legal. Next we'll click into the individual people to see how that further informs our plan.

| Buying Team | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|------------|--|--|
| Indiana University | | | | |
| in and the second second | # essers@indiana.edu | | | |
| Manager, Information Security | (3 15 | | | |
| **** | NEW ACTIVITY | | | |
| CRM Status: NEW TO YOU | | Add to CRM | | |
| at second | et 🐭 See s@u.edu | | | |
| Manager, Information Technology | (5 | | | |
| **** | | | | |
| CRM Status: NEW TO YOU | | Add to CRM | | |
| <u>G</u> de servicionalita in | al and yo@indiana.edu | | | |
| Advisor, Cyber Security Club at IU | (8 30 | | | |
| **** | NEW ACTIVITY | | | |
| CRM Status: In your CRM | | | | |

C. Here we've clicked through to view the interests of an individual member of the buying team. These "Prospect Insights," and specifically the "Research Areas" at the bottom, tell us the exact topics within the Network Security category that this manager cares most about. We get this information from the editorial and vendor content this person is consuming on our network. You'll use this to make sure you cover off on a number of these within your webinar content.

| < Pros | pect Insights > |
|--|---|
| Je ers in | |
| Manager, Information Security | br en |
| Seniority: Manager | (: 15 |
| Job Function: Security Systems | Indiana University |
| | Bloomington, Indiana |
| | United States |
| **** | |
| HIGHLIGHTS: * * * * * Actively Researching This Week | |
| Actively Researching This Week | |
| **** | |
| | |
| | |
| | |



Overcoming common barriers to a programmatic approach

Teams that do a lot of tactical execution can struggle to incorporate a more strategic outlook. There are different brain and body muscles alike here that do require some patient, methodical development so managers need to level set early expectations accordingly. That said, to build momentum efficiently, you'll want to acknowledge and lower as many logistical challenges as possible early on in your build.

Recruiting presenter talent

For many teams, finding presenters can seem like a problem. Before you launch your program, few people in the company have structured their schedules to accommodate such a role. And yet there are likely plenty of people who are presenting frequently to prospect and customer accounts. Time and time again, we've seen that by clearly explaining your objectives and how your strategy works to such players, our clients easily build a roster of internal presenters happy to participate in the ABM effort. Alternatively, for some episodes, you may choose an external presenter—

A few best practices for programmatic webinars

- Plan for each episode to be **30-40 minutes**, short enough to be digestible but enough time to get into some depth on a subject.
- Within a series, **run about one episode a month**, to provide a consistent opportunity for your audience to join and make time in their calendars for repeated attendance.
- Avoid recording a series in big batches if you can. While this may seem like an efficiency play, it reduces your opportunity to improve with each show and to bring to each the very latest in insight that you can.
- There certainly are **benefits to making both live and prerecorded episodes**. Live allows you to interact with the audience in-the-moment. Prerecorded gives you flexibility in scheduling, a chance to enhance the video with editing, and so forth.
- When launching a new series, plan to run at least three episodes before diving in deep on success evaluation. You can certainly compare each one to your ad hoc work, but it's really the ABM measures we discuss in this piece that you're trying to improve on.



an objective industry expert, for example-to add both a tone and a perspective that can be especially attractive to prospect audiences.

Selecting a hosting platform

While Zoom can be a stop-gap solution, once you're proceeding down the programmatic path, you'll probably want to consider a platform that offers more functionality and integration features. To select a platform that delivers well for all your needs, consider:

- Is the platform easy for your audience to use?
- Does the platform offer features to engage your audience during the episode, e.g., chat and polls?
- Is the platform easy for your team to use? What training is needed and do you have access to on-demand support?
- What additional capabilities does the platform support, e.g., live webinar recording, range of webinar formats, integration with your marketing automation, etc.?

Audience attraction, engagement in the moment and over time

As you probably realize from the webinar work you've already done, getting the audience to the webinar is part of the effort involved. Likewise, after the show, you'll want to have ways to build







on the fact that they registered or attended. The right platform and vendor-partner can go a long way towards facilitating useful preevent elements and actions such as invitations, event reminders, speaker profiles and thought-provoking advance questions. All

For more tips on building audience engagement watch Build a Better Webinar: Audience Engagement. of these and more help get your target audience interested and excited about the show. During the session you can enhance the experience by experimenting with chat boxes, polls and

Q&A opportunities that many audiences find particularly valuable. And after each webinar, you'll want to build in specific follow-up touches to maximize yield from what's just happened and build interest in what else is "coming soon."

Measuring an ABM webinar program

Since webinars can perform so well as individual demand gen tactics, you'll still want to include those measurement elements in your ABM reporting. Just be careful not to overweight on aggregate volume metrics that commonly can't easily provide the diagnostics needed to understand ABM strategy performance. While classic demand gen reporting can give you a good feel for the overall drawing power of your theme, series and episode choices, it can't fill in understanding of certain critical ABM elements.

Since you're trying to create engagement with the key buying centers within each account—and the critical personas they comprise—you need reporting that surfaces such objective-relevant information. Thus, for your near- and long-term



ABM objectives alike, you'll also want to be able to report on achievements that are at least account, role, function, and topic specific – that is, you should use measures that can inform you about outcomes related to whom your strategy is meant to attract. Without easy access to this level of insight, it will be much more difficult to know where and how you might improve performance quickly as your program continues to roll.

And then there are the actual end-goal business measures that underscore how different ABM is in execution from broad-reaching demand generation tactics. As we've discussed, your ABM target account list represents a shared understanding between sales and marketing both with respect to the potential of these accounts and the commitment to intentionally overweight the go-to-market effort applied to them. Capturing more revenue from each and every one possible is the very raison d'être of the ABM concept. So, while early on you'll need to depend on the milestone measures above as guides and for course correction, your overarching efforts must align to fueling and accelerating your pipeline to close. Since ABM engagement is pursued to enhance opportunity creation, you must measure that impact. Since accelerating opportunities through the pipeline yields more closed opportunities in a given period, you'll want to study engagement's impact on deal cycle time. And while your webinar program alone doesn't focus on an improved ratio of opportunities opened-to-closed/won, studying this measure can help inform other actions you may be able to take from an engagement perspective that will help improve yields.

Figure 5. To measure ABM success, you'll want to expand beyond typical demand gen metrics.

| Typical Demand Gen Performance Metrics | ABM-Oriented Metrics |
|---|---|
| Episode based and focused large- ly on targeting, content and volume outcomes | Focused on performance over time, with every account, on opportuni- ty yield and closed/won revenue outcomes |
| # of registrations | % of target accounts engaged |
| # of attendees | # and type (role and function) of individuals engaged per account |
| # of post-event views | # of buying centers identified/ engaged across the list and per account |
| # of MQLs, SALs, SQLs | # of opportunities created (in the period) across the list and per account |
| Meetings/conversions to opportunity | # and value of closed/won opportu- nities across list and per account |



Conclusion

Applying ABM as a strategy is predicated on the identification of a subset of accounts within the overall TAM that deserve special attention. It is a concerted effort that should extend over a long enough period of time so that the ABM program team can continuously evolve methodologies that successfully improve performance. As a different approach for a specific set of target accounts, ABM presents Marketing organizations with an opportunity to look beyond the methodologies and mindsets they've developed for classical demand gen-and the programmatic use of webinars for better account engagement represents a perfect example. Given their capacity to attract and engage audiences in rich, relevant experiences, webinars can be particularly efficient at bringing buyers and sellers together both in the moment and over time. Furthermore, taking more strategic advantage of these webinar characteristics and becoming adept at comfortably deploying them programmatically has proven to consistently deliver the account engagement improvement necessary to grow ABM revenue. Programmatic webinar planning and execution is therefore an approach that ABM teams should prioritize as they advance their ABM practice.



Designing a successful webinar program depends on access to quality insight about the accounts and people you're looking to engage. To begin building momentum early, you want

to start as close to "right" about these prospects as you can be. And, because your program will roll out over a significant period of time, you should have a way of monitoring any changes to this information that occur as you go. This is a perfect use case for intent data monitoring because it can provide the information necessary to build your program structure intelligently and deliver ongoing insights to help you tune and adjust at regular intervals. As the leading intent solution for enterprise tech vendors, TechTarget's Priority Engine[™] is ideally suited to support your programmatic webinar activities in this way. Speak with an expert today about putting it to work for your organization.



About TechTarget

TechTarget (Nasdaq: TTGT) is the global leader in purchase intentdriven marketing and sales services that deliver business impact for enterprise technology companies. By creating abundant, high-quality editorial content across more than 140 highly targeted technology-specific websites, TechTarget attracts and nurtures communities of technology buyers researching their companies' information technology needs. By understanding these buyers' content consumption behaviors, TechTarget creates the purchase intent insights that fuel efficient and effective marketing and sales activities for clients around the world.

TechTarget has offices in Boston, London, Munich, Paris, San Francisco, Singapore and Sydney.

For more information, visit techtarget.com and follow us on Twitter @TechTarget.



©2021 TechTarget. All rights reserved. The TechTarget logo is a registered trademark of TechTarget. All other logos are trademarks of their respective owners. TechTarget reserves the right to make changes in specifications and other information contained in this document without prior notice. The reader should in all cases consult TechTarget to determine whether any such changes have been made.

About the Authors

John Steinert is the CMO of TechTarget, where he helps bring the power of purchase intent-driven marketing and sales services to technology companies. Having spent most of his career in B2B



and tech, John has earned a notable reputation by helping build business for global leaders like Dell, IBM, Pitney Bowes and SAP– as well as for fast-growth, emerging players.

Follow John on Twitter @TechTargetCMO.

Fiona O'Connor is a content marketing practitioner at TechTarget. She crafts content that educates and inspires our customers, helping them chart a smarter path to success. As a career B2B marketer, Fiona uses her personal experiences to explore customer



challenges and pragmatic solutions through conversation and storytelling.

Updated 10/21