

Flexing Your ABS

The Ultimate Guide to
Planning and Maintaining an
Account-Based Sales Program



Table of Contents

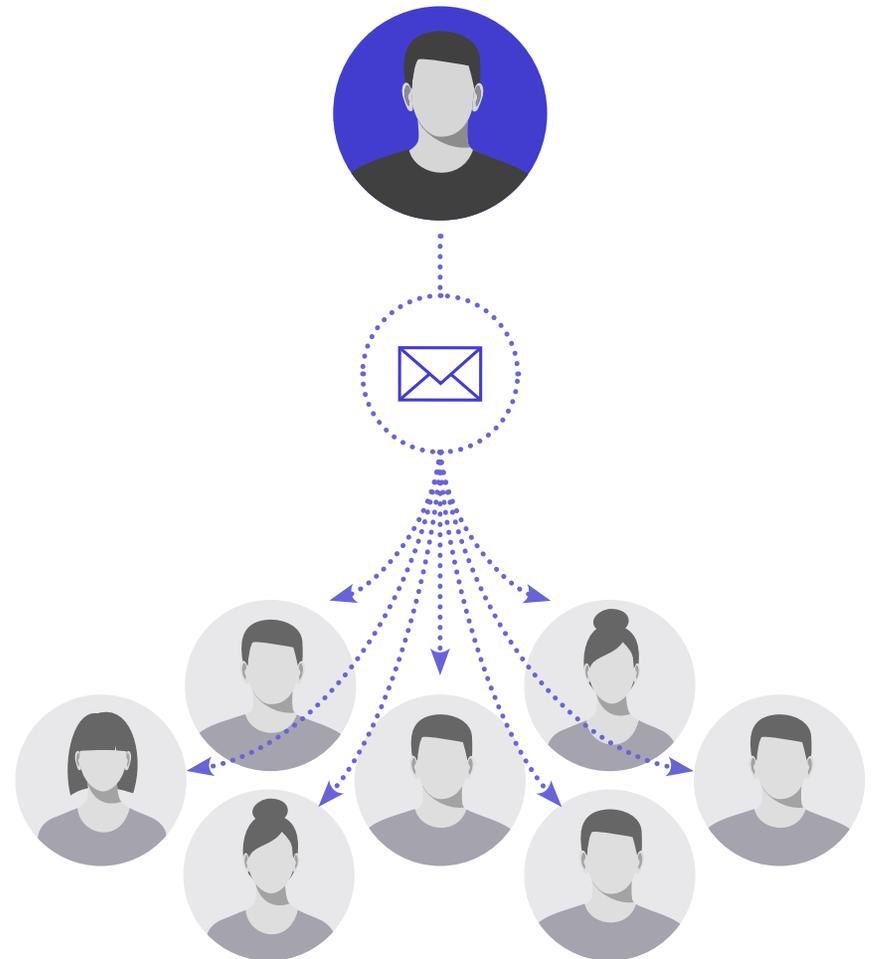
Executive Summary	3
What is Account-Based Sales (ABS)?	5
Identifying your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP)	8
How ABS Intersects with Account-Based Marketing (ABM)	11
ABS Personalization	13
Why Now?	17
Positive Momentum Forward	21



Executive Summary

For decades, marketing and sales teams have used high-volume sales tactics to drive revenue. This approach relied on probability: sending the same message to as many prospects as possible in hopes that a percentage would become customers.

On its own, this approach, often called “spray and pray,” can only get a business so far in today’s business to business (B2B) sales. B2B sales has evolved from products to sophisticated technologies, software as a service (SaaS), professional services, and other supports that are often subscription-based and highly customizable. In addition, B2B buyers now expect a personalized sales experience similar to the B2C (business to consumer) industry, where the solution is specifically tailored to their needs.



High-volume sales approach reached a lot of people, but sacrificed personalization.

To succeed in today's B2B industry, it's important to align your sales strategies to today's B2B sales and buyer expectations for personalization. In fact, according to [Accenture Interactive](#), "B2B executives are recognizing the urgency to adapt customer experiences and adopt personalization: 73% know that customer expectations for more meaningful products, services and experiences are significantly higher than they were just a few years ago, and 63% said they wanted to integrate personalization."

Account-Based Sales (ABS) strategies are an increasingly effective way to both demonstrate the value of complex products and services and tailor the sales strategies to today's B2B buyers and expectations for personalization.

This eBook is for B2B sales leaders who are interested in how ABS has raised the bar for B2B revenue and pipeline generation. You'll hear from sales experts and leading companies about how they implemented an ABS plan and the tactics they've used to make it successful. We'll also cover ABS basics, why it's the most popular topic in B2B sales today, outline its benefits, and things to consider before you implement your own ABS program.

Industry analysts predict that in 2019 alone, ABS program adoption will grow at least 150%, fueled by a 41% increase in account-based budgets.

- "2019 Account Based Benchmark Report," TOPO

According to Gartner,
account-based sales is predicted to become the default sales framework
for a majority of technology companies with annual revenues greater than \$5M.

What is Account-Based Sales (ABS)?

In simple terms, account-based sales (ABS) is a multi-touch, multichannel sales strategy where a select group of accounts are targeted as a market of one. Under an ABS program, all go-to-market teams play a part in identifying and executing

the high-touch, personalized strategies for each account and work together to convert, upsell, and cross-sell across the entire customer journey.

“The biggest difference between account-based sales and ‘sales’ is the relentless focus and commitment to the key accounts. Traditional sales is about sifting through prospects looking for the right fit with the right timing. ***In ABS, you are no longer sifting...you are selecting. You take a ‘ride or die’ approach to these accounts and are committed to winning whether it takes one day, one year, or one decade to get it done.*** You must be willing to commit resources to these accounts over longer periods of time to win business and ultimately expand.”

- Rob Jeppsen

CEO, Xvoyant

For example, a sales organization may decide to target accounts in a new vertical, and will dedicate staff and resources from marketing, sales, and other go-to-market (GTM) stakeholders to develop the ABS strategy. Sales and marketing will team up to identify the target accounts, and then develop specific strategies and messaging to reach and nurture these accounts. Once converted to customers, customer success and professional services teams may provide customized onboarding and implementation services, and executive leadership may meet with the customer to provide personalized services to maximize retention and identify potential upselling or cross-selling opportunities.

ABS programs are well-suited for landing customers that have multi-layered business needs and longer deal cycles due to multiple people on their buying committee. In a typical firm with 100-500 employees, an average of 7 people are involved in most buying decisions. This might include a sales manager or director, as well as individuals from sales operations, finance, legal, and someone at the executive level. Be sure to understand each person's potential objections and then create content to demonstrate value and build relationships with each person at the account.

“I’ve learned that once you’ve developed a key relationship in an account, you need to create a ‘mutual close plan’ where this person helps you create a ‘travel plan’ to get through the organization. This is a key step because now you get a blueprint of who needs to support the initiative and how to get access. This person will help you navigate the org and win the votes you need, as well as succeed without the votes you can’t get.”

- Rob Jeppsen

CEO, Xvoyant

Key Components of an ABS Strategy

At its core, a successful ABS strategy should outline the included departments, their roles, success metrics, timelines, and key milestones at across stages.

Your ABS strategy should include:

- Identifying your ideal customer profile and buyer needs
- Strategy for messaging, targeting, and roll out
 - » Identify specific campaigns for specific accounts
 - » Timing of campaigns
- Identifying which stakeholders need to be involved
- Each team or team members' role at each stage
- Protocol for communication across teams
- Frequent team meetings to share strategies, roadblocks, and data
- Software and applications needed to power your strategy
- Success metrics for each program and account

“A critical component of an ABS strategy is robust reporting. ***It’s critical to know the impact your marketing and sales activities are having on accounts and the larger revenue picture.*** Having a constant pulse on campaign effectiveness allows teams to pivot strategies quickly when needed.”

-Katelyn Martin

Senior Manager CRM Strategy & Engagement, [Jellyvision](#)

Identifying Your Ideal-Customer Profile (ICP)

One of the most important aspects to building your ABS strategy is identifying your ideal customer profile (ICP). In the past, sales organizations may have used basic information such as company size or revenue to create a crude segmentation strategy, but building an ICP should encompass more granular details about your future customers and their target market. Multiple variables play a part in determining ICP target creation, and B2B sales organizations should include all available information to create a true ICP.

Key areas to consider include:

- **The key market you want to target**—what are the industry trends, pain points, and personas to go after?
- **Determine which segment you want to reach**—how large are the organizations you’re trying to sell into? Is there one buying committee or multiple?
- **Target the accounts**—what are the barriers of entry, what is the potential revenue, and what is the overall customer lifetime value (LTV)?
- **Understand where the opportunities are within the**

account—which business area is your product or service most relevant to? What problems does it solve for marketing, sales, operations, human resources, etc.?

- **Research your persona**—Identify the decision-makers and who’s part of the buying committee.
- **Understand the likely technology stack**—how you will integrate with or replace specific tools with their current technology environment? Anticipate what their most common concerns or objections might be.

“We use very complex data sets applied to each customer, including core company data, people data, tech data, and signals data. Key for each is custom collected data that we use to inform when to target an account and what to talk about.”

- Ben Salzman

Advisor, [Dogpatch Advisors](#)

In addition, it's important to tap into the wealth of information that your internal teams have and integrate it into your ABS program:

- **Marketing** can provide additional research on potential customers to help the sales team understand what they're looking for from an organization and solution. Additionally, they can share which blog posts, ebooks, or social media posts are the most viewed, shared, or downloaded across your target market
- **Sales reps** can relay the most common objections or business needs that they've heard when talking to similar customers
- **Customer success and professional services** can share what types of customers have been the most successful with your product or services, and equally as important, which customers may have the most challenges



Q: Who are the key stakeholders that play a part in your ABS?

“Key stakeholders of our ABS strategy are revenue operations, marketing, and revenue leadership.”

- Katelyn Martin

Sr. Manager CRM Strategy & Engagement, [Jellyvision](#)

“Sales, marketing, C-level all play a part on our end. Marketing and sales are working together with reps putting out content to support webinars.”

- Patrick Joyce

Director of Business Development, [Fullcast.io](#)

“We involve stakeholders from ops, sales, marketing, AEs, SDRs and customer success.”

- Ben Salzman

Advisor, [Dogpatch Advisors](#)

“Our stakeholders include the sales leadership team, CEO, CFO, CMO, and whoever is the head of Customer Experience. Each need to be on the same page on why these are ‘ride or die’ accounts, and play a critical role in agreeing on how accounts will be targeted, what unique content will need to be created for each named account, how success will be measured, what the GTM plan will be for each account, and how the account will grow in very specific, intentional ways.”

-Rob Jeppsen

CEO, [Xvoyant](#)

How ABS Intersects with Account-Based Marketing (ABM)

Now that you have identified your ICP, sales and marketing should plan how your ABS strategy aligns with their Account-Based Marketing strategy (ABM).

The purpose of ABM is about creating hyper-targeted marketing campaigns and messaging to break through the noise to reach the selected accounts, and the purpose of ABS is to turn those leads into revenue. Making sure your marketing and sales teams are aligned is essential for the success of developing your ABS and converting leads faster.

At a high level, accounts must be identified and vetted for ABS, and then prioritized in some capacity whether your layering in third-party data, your own usage data, or historical information from your CRM. The final accounts selected for your ABS program should then be tiered based on priority.

“Aligning our ABS and ABM strategy is the #1 most critical part of what I do. If either team is working in a silo, then the strategy will almost certainly fail, and it will be quite an expensive fail at that. There must be buy-in and alignment across all relevant teams to ensure proper execution.”

- Harmony Anderson

Head of Demand Generation at [Outreach](#)

Selecting Accounts for Your ABS Program

Rob Jeppsen, *CEO, Xvoyant*

There are a few lenses to look through to justify if account warrants an ABS approach.

1) Strategic Impact

What kind of impact will this logo bring in the market by winning this business? How will this help you create a ripple effect that might knock over other dominoes you have in your ABS sights? You need a clear understanding of the decision dynamics inside each vertical market so you can identify the strategic accounts that will help you shorten the sales cycle with the other target accounts.

2) Sales Volume

The time and resources required for a meaningful ABS plan must be based on a strong financial return. If your targeted account plan doesn't have an expected revenue, take a lesson from "Monopoly" and "Do not pass Go and do not collect \$200"--you haven't earned it yet. Have a great revenue plan. Pilot through expansion, depending on your go-to-market.

3) Rep Development

The way great salespeople sell historically is very close to today's definition of ABS. The biggest difference is the time commitment to stay with the account until there's a win. There is no loss, just "not yet." This means you may want to choose some accounts that might be lower-hanging fruit so you can use them as teaching opportunities for reps needing to get on the scoreboard as you add them to the team.

"Marketing is crucial. A successful ABS/ABM process creates experiences that stimulates buyer engagement, and marketing needs to commit to finding or developing content that fuels the individual journey for each account. ***This means there will be some one-off requests, but this is part of the gig and marketing needs to be prepared to complete these as the sales processes advance.***"

Our ABM focuses on empathy, and understanding what the customer needs in order to be successful.

Our process aligns marketing and sales to collaborate on creating and implementing:

- Attention-getting combo of direct mail, emails, and phone calls
- Targeted, tailored messaging by value prop, account, and persona
- Revenue-focused goals to generate meetings with key personas

– Jeremy von Halle

VP of Revenue Operations, Jellyvision

ABS Personalization

It's time to put your ABS into motion by creating hyper-personalized content and strategic engagement strategies.

Sales and marketing should work together to leverage your research on the target market, as well as each persona and/or members of the buying committee to create the most effective content for your ABS program.

“When messaging is tailored to the specific company and buyer, it resonates more effectively because it allows that buyer to see the solution in their own world.”

- **Todd Caponi**, *Author of the award-winning book, [The Transparency Sale](#), and Managing Director of Chicago's [VentureSCALE](#), and Principal of [Sales Melon LLC](#)*

How do you Create Personalization in ABS?

In today's sales industry, most sales professionals know that more personalization leads to better results, but what does this mean for ABS?

To make ABS personal, remember that you're targeting group of accounts as a single market, with multiple stakeholders as part of the buying committee. With multiple stakeholders involved, sales professionals have to go beyond just checking individual LinkedIn profiles.

Teams can personalize their ABS program by:

- **Speak their Language:** use the same terminology as the target market
- **1:1 Content for each Persona:** each member of the buying committee will cover different business areas, so be sure to create content that specifically addresses their interests and potential objections
- **Timing:** connect when your customers are ready, considering everything from their fiscal year, timezone, contract expiration date with other companies, and meeting them where they're at in the buyers' journey.

“Personalized and valuable always wins. It stands out from the noise of the other sellers who are still hounding prospects into submission.”

- Todd Caponi

Author of the award-winning book, The Transparency Sale, and Managing Director of Chicago's VentureSCALE, and Principal of Sales Melon LLC

“ABS is only about personalization. **Your early messaging and content needs to refer to problems you’ve helped people solve that they’ve told you they care about.** This means you need to develop a lot of domain expertise with the personas you sell to and a strong point of view with stories to support it.”

-Rob Jeppsen

CEO, Xvoyant

ABS personalization examples include:

- Capturing a chief financial officer’s (CFO) attention through messaging or content that highlights how your product and/or services have reduced operational costs
- Crafting messaging for a CEO that illuminates how your product offers a competitive advantage for their own market and customers

A good way to map out your ABS personalization strategy is to put accounts into tiers and then determining what level of personalization each tier receives. For instance, the highest tier accounts may get a personalized email each time, but the second tier accounts may use more automated emails while still using your persona-based messaging. By separating accounts into tiers by priority, you ensure your front line reps spend time where you’ve identified the biggest potential and return on investment.

Outreach and Rule 5/2

Outreach is a proponent of ABS, and uses “Rule 5/2.”

This is our guideline that says you should be reaching out to, or be in contact with, five prospects in a target account at any time, and that two of them should be decision makers with purchasing power.

Following Rule 5/2 helps you build familiarity with targeted prospects, and Sequencing prospects from the Accounts page allows you to ensure you’re reaching out to the right quantity and diversity of prospects in a given account.

“We craft our messaging based on what we know, or don’t know, about an account and members of the buying group. Strategic accounts receive highly-personalized outreach and custom-marketing based on the persona and where they’re at in the buyers’ journey. Other accounts we’re able to segment out personalized messaging based on industry or use to gather more information on leads.”

- Katelyn Martin

*Senior Manager CRM Strategy & Engagement,
Jellyvision*

Why Now?

B2B sales has evolved and become increasingly complex, where business needs and customer processes are multilayered and involve multiple stakeholders. Additional factors, including advancements in sales technologies, the increase in subscription-based sales, and the near-universal use of ABM strategies make ABS the most-pressing topic in B2B sales today.

Technology Advancements

Technology has become a key factor in the growing adoption of ABS. Sales engagement platforms (SEPs), prospect intelligence tools, and the availability of deeper data into customer engagements provide a new level of insights that allow sales teams to hone in and target specific customers as a “market of one.”

Increase in Subscription-Sales Model

B2B sales has broadened beyond single-use products to selling products, services, and additional add-on supports that frequently utilize a subscription-based model. With the variety of options available under a subscription sales model, sales organizations can highly tailor the services to each customer and generates greater opportunities to upsell, cross-sell, and expand the contract through the customer lifecycle.

Account-Based Marketing

“When done right, ABS allows the seller to make the buyer smarter about their own business. Instead of telling them, ‘This is how awesome we are’, ABS is framed by ‘This is how awesome you can be.’”

- Todd Caponi

Author of the award-winning book, The Transparency Sale, and Managing Director of Chicago’s VentureSCALE, and Principal of Sales Melon LLC

In addition, the massive adaptation of Account-Based Marketing strategies in B2B sales signal that customers demand equally personalized sales strategies. By marrying ABM with ABS strategies, sales organizations are able to usher in a new era of personalization through an integrated, total account-based strategy that aligns GTM efforts to create an end-to-end experience for each account.

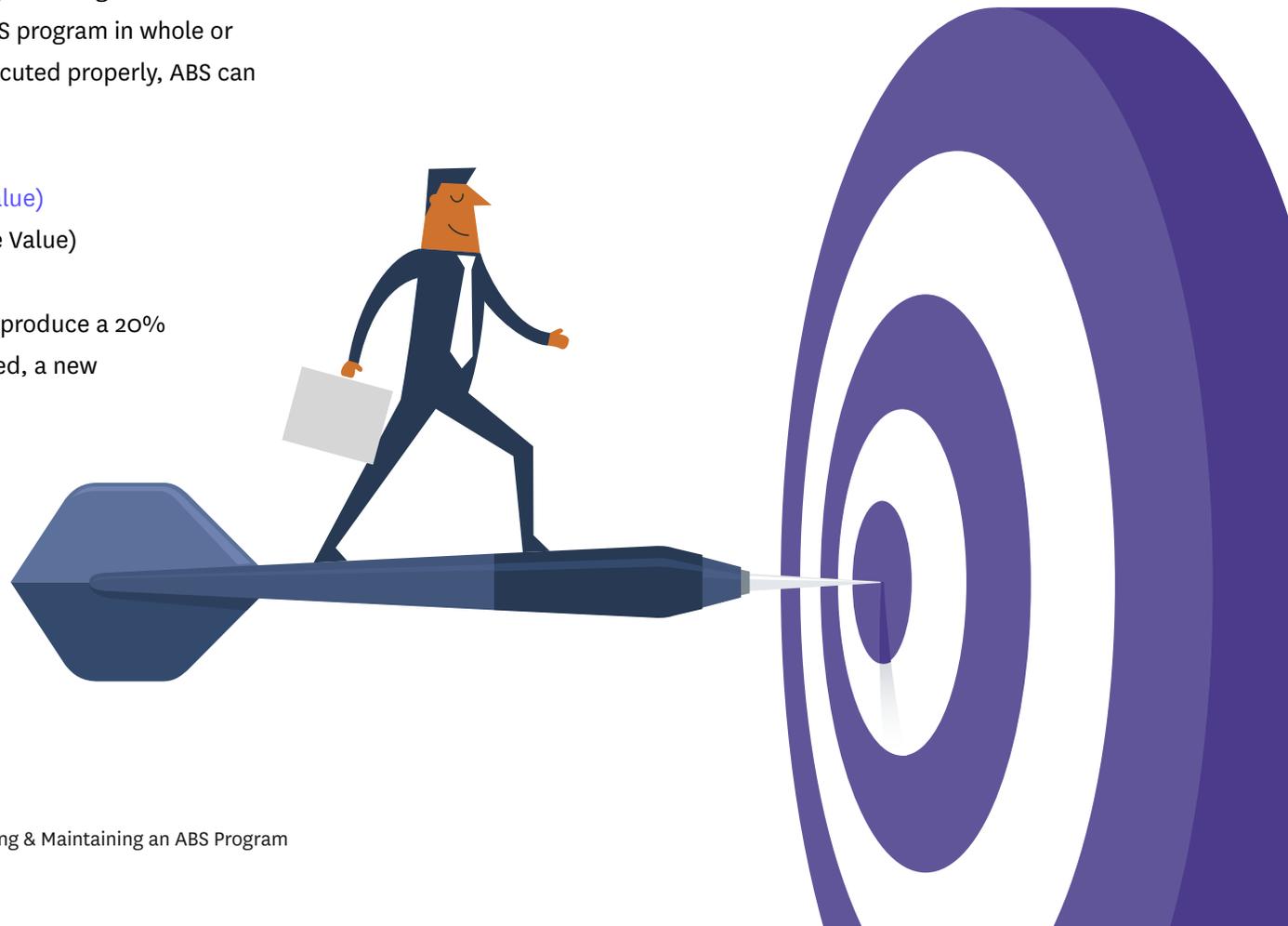
Given the opportunities that ABS offers, many sales organizations are transitioning toward implementing an ABS program in whole or in part for their own teams. In fact, when executed properly, ABS can yield the highest value of all GTM strategies:

- 75% increase in ACV (Annual Contract Value)
- 150% increase in CLV (Customer Lifetime Value)

In fact, industry analyst, TOPO, says ABS can produce a 20% opportunity rate: for every 5 accounts targeted, a new opportunity in a target account is created.

Is ABS Right for my Organization?

Sales organizations and leaders should assess if they have the resources and organizational flexibility to adapt an ABS model, either in whole or part. Factors to consider include ICP purchasing behavior, level of market awareness, staff resources, and operational expenses.



Blending ABS with High-Volume Strategies

“At Outreach, we believe a hybrid approach of ABS and high-volume strategies delivers the best results for us.

Volume strategies help us build a large base of small-to-medium-sized (SMB) customers, while ABS has helped us win and expand enterprise accounts. We also believe that marketing-sales alignment is essential for the success of account-based strategies, and so we focus on facilitating the coordination between both organizations and empowering sales to execute on the opportunities that it generates.”

-Mark Kosoglow

VP of Sales at Outreach

ICP Purchasing Behavior

If your ICP is mostly made up of small-to-medium-sized businesses (SMB) with simple purchases, an ABS model may not be advantageous, but will be key as you expand to larger segments. In addition, if your product or service is well-known to your market, your sales organization is less likely to need to carve out a dedicated ABS program to resource-heavy campaigns or messaging for prospects in the awareness phase.

Market Intelligence and Customer Data

Data and intelligence are the lifeblood of an ABS program. Organizations should have complete data on the key target accounts in order to target effectively, or have the platform and tools needed to get market intelligence and customer data to inform account personalization. Without this information, teams won't be able to identify a true ICP or effectively target them.

Availability of Staff Resources

For ABS to succeed, every team--sales, sales development, marketing, customer success, finance, product, engineering, customer support, and executive leadership--must be aligned and work collaboratively in order to upsell and cross-sell these clients.

A significant amount of time, resources, and information sharing is needed to align teams and determine the ABS program accounts, strategy, timeline, and success metrics. Sales orgs should determine if they have the resources to allocate staff, or a significant portion of staff time, to the ABS program. Selecting the right accounts, ensuring alignment between customer or prospect needs and seller expectations are prerequisites for successful account-based selling.

“The best way to convince C-suite that ABS is worth the effort is to double down on personalizing and ditch blast emails completely. I got a 36% reply rate with a personalized sequence versus just under 10% with boilerplate emails and voicemails. Nobody answers the phone or even has a phone in B2B SaaS—out of 100 numbers I was able to leave exactly 2 voicemails.”

-Patrick Joyce

Director of Business Development, [Fullcast.io](https://www.fullcast.io)

Positive Momentum Forward

For sales organizations looking to take on B2B enterprise customers or move upmarket, ABS is a key strategy to execute on your objectives. With the right ICP, messaging, timing, and sales engagement platform, ABS can generate greater revenue and market strength for you and your business.

“Sales tricks are for magicians—today’s trick will almost immediately lose its effectiveness. However, what has and will always work is optimizing for how human beings prefer to engage, focus, and learn. Our brains haven’t changed in that regard. It’s why account-based sales works—it will always check all of the boxes.”

- Todd Caponi

Author of the award-winning book, [The Transparency Sale](#), and Managing Director of Chicago’s [VentureSCALE](#), and Principal of [Sales Melon LLC](#)

About Outreach

Outreach frees sales teams to focus on what matters: engaging customers. Our sales engagement platform enables reps to stand out and connect with prospects and customers in meaningful ways. Outreach brings to light what resonates best, so you can create a playbook for your entire team's success. From **startups to enterprises**, **account-based sales to workflow strategies**, **companies rely on Outreach to simplify the path to predictable revenue.**

Ready to learn more?

[REQUEST A DEMO](#)

