From Programme to Principle

Account-based marketing's next chapter

inflexion

Insight

B2B go-to-market models are changing, and ABM programme leaders are having to lead a continuous transformation rather than a one-off fix. With account-based thinking taking the lead and operating models in permanent flux, ABM is moving beyond a programme to a principle underpinning the new go-to-market (GTM) approach. We call this account-based growth: the shift from an ABM programme to a growth principle, delivered by orchestrating across marketing and other client facing teams for the benefit of the customer. Done well, this is invisible as orchestration to the customer. It just feels like dealing with a partner who understands them regardless of who they're speaking to or what content they see, and who shows them the way forward rather than waiting to be directed. Orchestration is key to success across the accounts that matter most – human-led, AI-enabled, and coherent across every touchpoint a customer has with the business. But getting from here to there is not a single change programme with an end point, it's a continuous one, and most marketing teams are having to run it while still delivering results.

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B2B go-to-market is changing

These complex GTM models are being remade by four forces at once.

1

AI is rewriting both sides of the buying process.

Suppliers are using it to personalise and orchestrate execution; buyers are using it to write tenders, score submissions and shortlist suppliers before a human ever sees the deal. Governance has not caught up. AI adoption inside most marketing functions still has the feel of the 'wild west', with tools proliferating across teams and geographies outside any central oversight. This isn't a marketing-only problem. As organisations move from AI tools to autonomous agents acting on their behalf, governance questions – such as how agents are permissioned, how their actions are audited, and how their cost is managed – are becoming board-level issues that marketing will need to operate within, not solve alone.

2

AI is closing the gap between what buyers have always wanted and what suppliers can deliver.

Senior buyers have wanted suppliers who behave like part of their company for as long as anyone can remember. What's changed is capacity: genuine strategic relationships have always been constrained by the human hours needed to sustain them, and AI is starting to remove that ceiling. Executives demand access to new ideas, honesty about what's gone wrong before, not just what's gone right, and consistency of strategy and people over years, not quarters, and AI is making it possible to deliver that for more of the accounts that matter. We set out what good looks like in *Executive Engagement Strategies* (Burgess, Kogan Page, 2020).

3

Sustainable growth is narrowing to a smaller number of deeper relationships.

Across every conversation (our ABM Benchmarking Study, our quarterly Global ABM Forum, and direct client work), we find the same pattern holds true: growth is increasingly concentrated in relatively few accounts, and in the depth and trust of those relationships, not the breadth of a funnel. The advantage goes to teams who can identify the accounts that matter most and focus the business on them.

4

The boundaries of ABM itself are dissolving.

For most of its life, account-based marketing has existed as a specialist programme, owned by a team, focused on an agreed set of prioritised accounts, reported on separately from the rest of marketing. That containment is breaking down. Programme leaders increasingly describe account-based thinking spreading across field, industry and customer marketing and even partner marketing. Less a discipline with edges, more a set of principles other teams are absorbing. That dissolving boundary raises a question every leader making this shift has to keep answering, not answer once: as account-based thinking spreads across field, industry, customer and partner marketing, what's marketing's role versus business development versus sales, and how do you attribute return on investment across them? A 'win or lose together' culture doesn't remove the pressure to show what marketing's spend specifically delivers – if anything, shared ownership makes that harder to isolate, not easier. Even organisations that believe they've settled this should expect it to resurface as budgets tighten or leadership changes.

Operating models are in flux

This creates a genuine bind for the people running ABM programmes today.

They are being asked to prove commercial value in language the C-suite respects, at the same moment their operating model, their tools and even their job title are all in flux. Many are absorbing AI tools faster than their organisations can govern them. Many are caught between global consistency and local relevance, between centralising for control and decentralising for responsiveness. And there is no universal answer here. The right balance depends on the organisation, and because the pace of change is now so fast, the balance that's right today is unlikely to still be right in six months.

This is a calibration to keep making, not a decision to make once. And many are quietly aware that if they don't articulate what ABM becomes next, someone else – often from a general 'GTM transformation' initiative – will decide for them, and the specialist expertise built up over decades could be lost in the process.

For some leaders this isn't a headache but an existential question: if account-based thinking is meant to run through the whole business, why does the organisation still need dedicated ABM people at all? And if the answer is 'to hold everyone else to the principle', how do you actually know the organisation is living up to it, rather than just relabelling business as usual?

> We had to hold our nerve and make the case internally, repeatedly, that depth beats breadth when your target universe is 50 or 100 accounts, not 50,000."
> Head of Global Industry and Account Based Marketing.
>
> **Inflexion Group 2026 ABM Benchmarking Study**

The leadership problem, in short:

how do you evolve a proven discipline into the organising principle for growth, without losing the rigour, the relationships and the results that made it work in the first place?

ABM is moving from programme to principle

The organisations that get this right won't be running a bigger or better ABM programme. They'll have turned account-based thinking into an operating principle – the default lens through which marketing, alongside sales, customer success and the executive team all see their most important customers, embedded in how the business runs and grows rather than bolted on as a specialist activity.

We've written about this as a strategy in *Account-Based Growth* (Burgess and Shercliff, Kogan Page, 2022). It's a shift from campaigns and programmes, run by specialist and often siloed teams, to continuously orchestrated engagement across the accounts that matter most.

Three things distinguish orchestrated growth from ABM as most businesses practise it today:

1. It's foundational, not departmental.
Account-based principles run through sales, marketing, customer success and delivery – not owned by one team and defended at its edges.

2. It's sensed and responded to in real time,
not planned once a year and executed in campaigns – because AI now makes real-time responsiveness possible at a scale human teams alone could never sustain.

3. It puts the human moment at the centre, not the margins.
The more execution AI takes on, the more the remaining human interactions – the relationship, the judgement, the trust – become the actual differentiator. Orchestration, not automation, is the discipline that makes this work.

For the customer, this should be felt rather than seen: a supplier who behaves consistently whoever they're dealing with and whatever content they encounter, who anticipates what they need next rather than waiting to be told, and who treats the relationship as something that adapts in real time rather than resets each quarter.

That's the North Star worth articulating to your own organisation. Not 'we run ABM better', but 'our customers experience one company, one relationship, wherever they touch it'. Spell out what being integrated rather than siloed, what sensing and responding in real time, and what putting the human moment first actually mean for customers, not just for the business and its people.

> Our business is 95% repeat business, so we start with our 80/20, and focus on the 20% of the 20% that are our largest and fastest growing customers."
> VP Marketing.
>
> **Inflexion Group 2026 ABM Benchmarking Study**

It's all about orchestrating success

For a business that makes this shift, three things become true.

1. Commercial credibility, not just marketing credit. Account-based growth is recognised – and funded – as central to business strategy, with its contribution to revenue, retention and reputation articulated in terms the board already uses, not translated after the fact.

2. Teams built for orchestration, not just execution. The people doing this work think 'account-in' not 'programme-out'. They blend strategic marketing thinking, commercial acumen and AI fluency. They orchestrate across marketing, and increasingly the wider business, for the benefit of the customer.

3. Broader and deeper relationships. Hyper-personalisation becomes table stakes rather than an aspiration and is available to all accounts. But for top accounts, relationships are built on genuine customer intimacy – real understanding of a customer's world, not just their digital behaviour –and engagement becomes part of the service delivered to the customer.

This is both a change in operating model and mindset, and most marketing teams are not equipped to manage such a complex change programme.

> "We try to minimise hand-offs between teams, but we could get better here and AI will help, e.g. by creating a brief and turning that into a plan including channel mix and orchestration."
> VP Account Marketing
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> **Inflexion Group 2026 ABM Benchmarking Study**

Inflexion Group can help

We've spent over two decades helping the world's most complex B2B businesses build account-based operating models. Our approach mirrors the shift we're describing: we don't just diagnose and design a strategy then leave; we build the change programme that launches it and enable your own teams to run it, through our ABM Academy.

Our CEO, Bev Burgess, coined the term 'account-based marketing' in 2003. In 2020, she published *Executive Engagement Strategies* (Burgess, Kogan Page, 2020), setting out exactly the kind of senior relationship this paper argues buyers now expect.

In 2022, she and our Chairman, Tim Shercliff, defined what it takes to make an account-based growth strategy work in *Account-Based Growth* (Burgess and Shercliff, Kogan Page, 2022). Then, in 2025, twenty-two years after she coined the term, Bev published *Account-Based Marketing* (Burgess, Kogan Page, 2025), now the definitive handbook on the discipline itself. Nobody has been closer to this shift for longer.

The name Inflexion Group was never accidental. Complex, global B2B businesses reach genuine inflexion points – moments where the old operating model stops working and a new one must take its place.

Account-based marketing's shift from programme to principle is exactly that kind of moment for B2B go-to-market as a whole. We're here to help you recognise it and navigate through it.

About the author

Bev Burgess

Chief Executive and Co-founder, Inflexion Group

Bev Burgess is passionate about the critical role marketing can play in building deep customer relationships, strong reputations and sustainable growth. She is best known as a worldwide authority on account-based marketing (ABM) and her new book, *Account-Based Marketing: The definitive handbook for B2B marketers* explains how to use ABM effectively in your business (Kogan Page, 2025).

She is co-author of *Account-Based Growth: Unlocking sustainable value through extraordinary customer focus* (Burgess and Shercliff, Kogan Page, 2022) *and* *A Practitioner's Guide to ABM: Accelerating growth in strategic accounts* (Burgess with Munn, Kogan Page, 2021). Her other books include *Executive Engagement Strategies* (Kogan Page, 2020) and *Marketing Technology as a Service* (Young and Burgess, Wiley, 2010).

About Inflexion Group

Inflexion Group is the world's leading independent account-based marketing consultancy, bringing together a deeper bench of experienced ABM practitioners than any other firm to serve clients around the globe.

As B2B go-to-market models transform, ABM is moving from a programme to a principle, orchestrated across marketing for the benefit of key clients. We help marketing leaders build new operating models that deliver account-based growth and help more marketers, wherever they sit in the business, adopt ABM thinking.

Co-founded by Bev Burgess – a globally recognised ABM authority and author of 'Account-Based Marketing' (Burgess, Kogan Page, 2025) – with Louise Jefferson and Tim Shercliff, the firm combines strategic advisory, practitioner-led research and the ABM Academy, providing certified training and mentoring from introductory to expert level. The Academy's alumni network is now putting ABM thinking into practice across the world's leading B2B organisations.

With a team that has trained over 10,000 marketers and worked with more than 50 global organisations including Accenture, AWS, IBM, PwC, Salesforce and Vodafone, Inflexion Group sets the standard for ABM excellence worldwide.

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