



How SaaS providers can use Account-Based Marketing strategies to protect business and generate growth during and after COVID-19

OVERVIEW

COVID-19 and the ensuing work-from-home culture have highlighted the value and necessity of the Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) industry—but that doesn't mean there aren't any pain points. In fact, for many SaaS companies, the health crisis and economic downturn are first true tests in the effectiveness of their business models and overall strength of their partnerships. At the forefront of the challenges is cost, of course: Customer budgets are shrinking as the economy remains precarious, and their financial teams must reevaluate where the software budget can be edited or slashed completely. At the same time, demand and expectations for easily adoptable, remote-friendly SaaS solutions remains high—and the competition is steep.

So, what's the best way for SaaS companies to navigate this ever-changing landscape? How can they maintain both client relationships with flexibility and empathy, as well as their own top line? Finally, how can SaaS companies identify new, high-value leads and beat out competitors as the world moves beyond the pandemic?

Enter **Account-Based Marketing**, a B2B marketing strategy that solves each problem SaaS companies are currently experiencing, as well as those challenges decision makers will encounter in 2021.



SaaS revenue is expected to increase from \$116 billion in 2020 to \$133 billion in 2021. (Gartner)

STEP 1. Mind The Customer Relationship

Here's how ABM strategies can help your SaaS company take advantage of the industry's 15% growth—even during an economic downturn.

ABM Strategy: Align sales, marketing, and customer success teams—and provide customer-specific solutions to retain business

In order to develop the best response to current customers looking for financial relief, SaaS companies have to understand how the coronavirus is impacting their own business at all stages. Was there an initial blowback from customers regarding cost or terms of contract? Exactly how much relief can the company feasibly provide customers? Are payment terms flexible? What offers and negotiations can be made as clients grapple with changes in their financial situation? Can a credit be extended, and for how long?

This awareness starts with extensive internal communication. ABM champions the relationship between sales, marketing, and customer success teams, as each one experiences direct customer interaction at different stages of the customer journey. Each team must be aligned on the company's needs, customer asks, and what, if any, changes have been made to the business model

and offerings. This results in what EY calls "rapid customer triage," a three-stage customer communication plan for all requests and offers. At stage 1, payment terms can be addressed, including frequency in billing and exemptions for extended payments. Stage 2 focuses on credits and trials, as customers will be intrigued by grace periods, paused account suspensions, and free trials. The final stage is more broad, offering free services, pricing restructure, and even pause in contract.

While a SaaS company's initial relief response will, and should, differ by solution and customer, these early endeavors will impact the top line tremendously. If sales, marketing, and customer care work in lockstep to position themselves to customers as supportive and accommodating, the existing business will remain protected and serve as a solid starting point for new business opportunities.



To survive a crisis and retain users during COVID-19, SaaS companies must respond and adjust to the new landscape that their customers face. However, the right response is reliant on a brand's ability to empathize with their users. Pekka Koskinen, Forbes Contributor

STEP 2. Focus on Gaining Loyalty and Trust From Customers

ABM Strategy: Personalized, relevant content breeds engagement, upsells and cross-sells customers, and finds potential high-value leads

If SaaS companies want to do more than tread water during the pandemic, efforts need to extend far past the initial rapid customer triage. When overall growth is the end goal, nurturing accounts throughout the SaaS customer journey is paramount—for both current customers and new leads.

Building or nurturing these trusted relationships relies on engaging the customer or potential customer through content marketing. More specifically, SaaS companies must provide tailored pieces of content that inform, educate, and add value to the solution they provide. Under the ABM lens, content should always be personalized by account, buyer persona, and stage of the customer journey... and this strategy works. ABM boasts an increase in ROI for 84% of companies; and a large part of that increase is due to the role of content.

In the age of COVID-19 and smaller software budgets, effective content marketing is truly the glue that keeps a customer a customer, or it's the deciding factor between the solution and a direct competitor. Below, discover a few key ways SaaS companies can use content marketing to develop positive relationships with those who utilize or are considering utilizing their solutions.

How Content Marketing in ABM Builds Loyalty and Trust in SaaS Companies

- **Provide Premium Content:** Customers have high expectations—especially now. A simple blog post and an ad set aren't going to cut it. If a SaaS company wants to engage or impress, the content must be unique to the client, well-researched, and applicable to their needs. Case studies and white papers are some of the most powerful ways of building trust in the SaaS world; use them to tell encouraging customer success stories and share informative strategies or industry updates.
- **Use Customer Segmentation:** Now more than ever, customers want to feel acknowledged and appreciated by the companies they spend money with, and they want to know the company cares enough to do its research. If it doesn't care enough, another SaaS company will—and they'll eventually win the business. At the same time, marketing, sales, and customer success teams at SaaS organizations probably don't have a lot of bandwidth. Here, they can rely on customer segmentation (broken down by business type, products used, job title, location, etc) to deliver applicable content, updates, and changes within the SaaS company. While automation can be the death of some ABM campaigns (personalization often gets thrown out the door), it can be helpful in the right use case for SaaS organizations.

• **Communicate At All Stages:** On that same note, customers across the board want transparency. They want to know what's available to them, and they want to understand where their dollar is being spent. For SaaS companies, this means using content and digital marketing channels to disseminate information about new products and features—which then creates upselling and cross-selling opportunities. But it's a two-way street; SaaS companies should also work directly with customers to address their concerns and consume their feedback about software and UX. If users feel like they're heard, they stick around. Most importantly, though, all communication between SaaS companies and customers should be done with empathy and respect. In an

environment full of uncertainty, customers want to work with other businesses that are responsive and genuine in their operations and communication.

Remember, Salesforce didn't become the largest SaaS company in the U.S. overnight. The process of developing a SaaS solution into a trusted brand with a loyal following takes time and work. Developing an engaging content marketing strategy helps SaaS organizations get there—even during a pandemic.



...personalized content is the key to engaging an oftentimes complex buying committee. These are the types of deals that aren't achieved with one email and one click. They require weeks, sometimes months, of increasing awareness and building a trusted connection between the seller and buyer.

Vincent DeCastro, Entrepreneur.com Contributor and President at The ABM Agency

STEP 3. Outrank the Competition— Now and In the Future

ABM Strategy: Don't forget about longer term strategies and the importance of intent data

According to [SaaS Mag's](#) 2020 SaaS Market Overview, "SaaS has paved the way for consumers to more easily sample solutions and more effectively choose products. This has seen a proliferation in SaaS startups and increased competition among service offerings." That means competition is fierce in the SaaS industry, even with the rise of COVID-19.

If a company isn't a SaaS giant, like a Zoom or a Shopify, how does it set itself apart from competitors? Luckily, ABM thrives on competition. Its tactics, when executed correctly, work to push accounts from the awareness to the evaluation and purchase stages—beating out other contenders vying for the sale.

SEO Generates New Opportunities

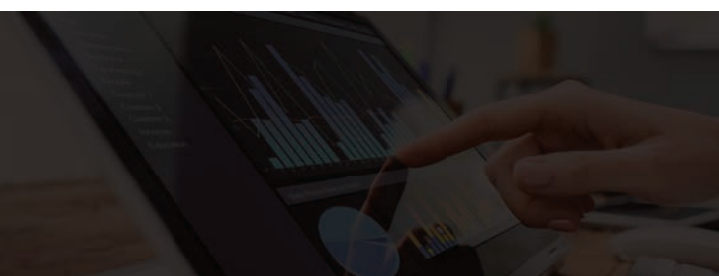
There's no doubt that SEO (search engine optimization) is a long term marketing tactic—but it shouldn't be overlooked in an overall ABM strategy. In ABM, getting in front of the buying committee at the very beginning of the research process is crucial. By utilizing best SEO practices, SaaS companies ensure familiarity with their brand's name or service and begin to gain an account's trust, right as they're starting to figure out what SaaS resources are available on the market. While finding new customers is extremely difficult in the current economy, this situation won't last forever. Ranking well on Google will only help fuel growth for SaaS companies who come out on the other side.

Stay Focused: Retarget with Intent Data

B2B, and especially SaaS companies, usually have a much longer sales cycle than B2C brands. It's extremely unlikely customers will be ready to buy after one visit to the website—especially when they're going to shop around for the best deal and fit for their company. This gives SaaS companies the opportunity to re-engage potential customers in a variety of ways. Whether it's through programmatic ads, paid search, paid social, or email marketing, SaaS organizations can utilize first and third party intent data to perfect timing when it comes to marketing and sales outreach.

Win Through Referral Marketing

Organic referrals are far from a thing of the past. In fact, they're often among the most productive types of leads—and will continue to be during and after a COVID-19 vaccine is released. ABM strategies—content marketing, targeting fewer accounts, and using customized messaging—work hand in hand with referrals as it's a marketing strategy built around the idea of nurturing relationships. If organic referrals are the long game, SaaS companies need to continue to play the short game with kindness, flexibility, and a focus on customer retention.



CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has shaken every business—from the restaurant industry to healthcare to publishing. Like these industries, SaaS companies have had to alter their strategies in order to keep business alive. While the changes might not be as apparent as the pivots in hospitality, for instance, they still require as much consideration, attention to detail, and focus on the customer experience.

For SaaS organizations, this means leaning into an account-based marketing and customer-centric approach, which includes aligning internal teams, providing customer-specific solutions to retain business, creating personalized, relevant content, and simultaneously keeping an eye on what steps can be taken to generate growth when the pandemic ends.



THE ABM AGENCY WHITE PAPER

