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School of Business and Management

Master's Program in International Marketing Management (MIMM)

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Designing an account-based marketing program

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ABSTRACT

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Title:	Designing an account-based marketing program
Faculty:	LUT School of Business and Management
Major:	International Marketing Management
Year:	2017
Master's Thesis:	Lappeenranta University of Technology
Examiners:	Professor Asta Salmi Associate Professor Hanna Salojärvi
Keywords:	Marketing automation, content marketing, organizational buying behavior, sales management, account-based marketing, case study

This study combines literature from organizational buying behavior, marketing automation and content marketing, and sales management in order to design an account-based marketing program for a case company that operates in business-to-business markets. Marketing automation and content marketing in recent years has become a strategic development topic for companies that operate in both business-to-business and business-to-consumer markets, while research in this fast-developing arena is lagging. In this sense, it brings new insight into how a company could design its online marketing efforts to enhance sales and marketing alignment in business-to-business environments.

This study shows that designing and account-based marketing program is a complex process that spans across various different theories. In practice, account-based marketing process is divided into six steps. First, the company must map its business objectives and how those relate to specific accounts. Second, the company must map out their knowledge of the customer, and how it relates to the offering of the case company. Third, it must develop thought leadership by embarking on the development of a content strategy. Fourth and fifth, the case company needs generate, track and nurture leads by choosing the channels in which content is distributed and measure effectiveness. Finally, it must set up appropriate protocols for supporting sales. In conclusion, this thesis provides further direction for studying how business-to-business companies operate their digital marketing activities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“When one chapter closes another one opens” is a quote that one often sees, but now that I am closing this chapter it truly feels like another chapter opens. The time spent at Lappeenranta seems to have flown by, and now a milestone that seemed far away at first is at reach.

First and foremost, I must thank Lappeenranta University of Technology teaching staff for making studying interesting yet challenging, and giving me the opportunity to study here. It truly has been a wonderful two years and I am grateful. At this point, I also must give credit to myself for having the patience, drive, and focus for finishing my studies and my thesis.

I also must acknowledge Associate Professor Hanna Salojärvi for providing me with guidance when completing this thesis and devoting time for discussion. These discussions and guidance were a difference maker when facing challenges. Also, a thank you is reserved for Professor Asta Salmi.

On another note, I must thank the case company for allowing me to research such an interesting topic, and giving me access to the various stakeholders involved. This was not just a research topic, but also a position for me to learn and develop new skills. This has been an exciting, challenging, and interesting six months working on this project and a big thank you goes out to all the people involved.

Also, I must acknowledge my friends and family for the support that they have given. Thank you to my parents Eija and Anssi for pushing me to continue my studies at a higher level and in general for being supportive throughout the years. Finally, a big thank you goes to my girlfriend for being patient, understanding, and supportive throughout my studies and the process of writing this thesis.

On to new challenges,

Anton Paavola

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1 Introduction

The master's thesis topic was suggested as a potential avenue of research as a result of being employed in the case company during the summer of 2016. During discussions with the chief marketing officer, it became clear that account-based marketing was a key development topic in the coming years for the company. The case company operates in industrial sales, where long sales cycles are present and investments fluctuate with global economic trends. In order to cope with these challenges the case company decided that account-based marketing could be used to support the sales process in an online context aligning sales and marketing to work more together. Account-based marketing has been gaining popularity among business-to-business companies (Simpson, 2017).

Kaj Storbacka and the Strategic Account Management Association (SAMA) (2016, 55) propose that account-based marketing is the consideration of communicating to customers as a market of one, instead of spreading marketing resources thinly across the organization based on a large "target" market. Account-based marketing tailors the marketing approach for each account supporting the customer buying behavior in achieving its goals. It was introduced by the Information Technology Services Marketing Association in reaction to the needs of their members. (SAMA and Storbacka, 2016, 55) These members all faced three critical issues consisting of complex value propositions, long sales cycles, and large customers. On the other hand development of tools such as CRM-software, marketing automation, and advanced analytics make account-based marketing scalable. According to Simpson (2017) the core principles of account-based marketing are as follows. Firstly, marketing and sales need to align and partner, the goal should be to build reputation and relationships instead of just having a revenue focus, campaigns should be tailored to each individual account, and everything should be built on customer insight.

Account-based marketing in itself is not a new concept but it has recently regained popularity as business to business marketers are increasingly looking to improve marketing performance (Compton, 2016, 23). Several key characteristics need to be identified when investigating the applicability of account-based marketing. First of all, the company should usually operate in B2B markets selling to larger accounts. Secondly, account-based marketing is appropriate for businesses characterized by high-value products and services with long consideration-to-purchase cycles. Furthermore, there should be a need to deepen

understanding of buyer experiences and challenges as they manifest, instead of what they should be. In other words, it requires targeted marketing communications to specific accounts meeting their business pain points instead of generic marketing and advertising campaigns to key accounts (Compton, 2016, 16). The final characteristic identified by Compton (2016, 23) is the willingness to identify prospects and opportunities outside the traditional sales funnel of the company. The last issue is a critical differentiator as it shows the shift away from standard marketing automation practices but specifically focuses on key accounts or defined accounts that create an account portfolio of strategic customers.

Based on these arguments account-based marketing shares similar characteristics with customer relationship management thinking as Payne and Frow (2004, 526) argue that customer relationship management (CRM), not the IT-system, is a management approach that seeks to create, develop and enhance relationships with carefully targeted customers to maximize customer value, corporate profitability, and thus shareholder value. CRM is often associated with the careful utilization of information technology to implement relationship marketing strategies. At its' core customer relationship management unites the potential of new technologies and new marketing thinking to deliver profitable long-term relationships. Based on these arguments it can be concluded that by utilizing new marketing technologies account-based marketing facilitates applying customer relationship management principles in practice. Relevant literature surrounding this topic include digital marketing channels, content marketing, marketing automation, customer buying behavior, value based selling and the selling process, and information enabled customer relationship management.

In this light, this thesis attempts to shed insight into the conceptualization of account-based marketing through a design of an account-based marketing program conducted as a single case study. In this sense, it contributes to literature on online business-to-business marketing, marketing automation, and merging sales and customer buying processes in the online business-to-business context. From a managerial perspective, account-based marketing is becoming an increasingly important development topic for multiple business-to-business organizations. For example, the Information Technology Service Marketing Association in their survey reported that 78% of respondents believe that account-based marketing is important to their overall strategy while 86% of respondents indicated that the importance of account-based marketing has increased in the last two years (Simpson, 2017; ITSMA,

2016). In conclusion, defining what account-based marketing is and conceptualizing it in the case company is the focus of this research.

1.1 The research gap

Kannan and Li (2017) develop a framework for research in digital marketing and identify areas of the marketing process and marketing strategy where digital marketing is having an impact or will impact. As argued by Kannan and Li (2017, 24) digital marketing technologies are changing the environment where companies operate in. This focuses on how consumer behavior is changing, how digital marketing facilitates interactions, the emergence of two-sided markets, and the role of search engines. Next, digital marketing is also affecting the company itself, impacting the traditional product, price, promotion, and place framework of marketing (Kannan and Li, 2017, 24). As argued by Kannan and Li (2017, 25) new channels are rising for customer communications and promotions within social media, search engines and email where Järvinen and Taiminen (2016, 174) have emphasized that more research is required in analyzing the role that automation can play in marketing channels in the business to business context.

Digital marketing is having an impact on outcomes that spans across different dimensions such as creation and extracting value (Kannan, 2017, 25) where Töytäri and Rajala (2015, 122) suggest that more research is required in studying value for more generalizable findings especially in how value is communicated and extracted. Outcomes reflect how the firm can benefit from digital marketing technology opportunities in terms of creating value for customers and creating value for the firm itself. Finally, according to Kannan and Li (2017, 25) digital marketing is also impacting marketing research and general marketing strategy. Marketing research focuses on acquisition and processing of information generated from using digital technologies such as tracking customer actions on websites. Also, marketing strategies are being impacted the previously discussed aspects. By considering these key areas of research this thesis attempts to design an account-based marketing program in the case company. This thesis then adds new knowledge to the interplay that occurs between these theoretical considerations. In this sense, it adds new knowledge to digital marketing strategic thinking, digital customer relationship management, and communication of value in the digital realm.

This thesis focuses on the promotion aspect of the framework and how promotion can be conducted in an online business to business context using digital marketing tools and thus adds new research into how digital marketing promotion can be organized and how it is connected to industrial sales (Kannan and Li, 2017, 25). Kannan and Li (2017, 25) state that more research is needed into scalable modeling methods and how executing promotion that makes use of large data sets with automation. Furthermore, Kannan and Li (2017, 40) argue that further research is needed into how firm generated content (content marketing) can be used in promoting sales in both online and offline channels and what the role of digital communication channels are (Karjaluoto, et. al, 2015, 709) in increasing transparency of the customer purchase process as it relates to tactics employed by companies (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016, 174). As argued, this thesis addresses the research gap of how firm generated content (content marketing) can be used online in promoting industrial sales through a design of an account-based marketing program that uses digital marketing technologies and automation.

1.2 Research questions

From these generalizations, the purpose of this thesis is to design an account-based marketing program for the case company. Thus, the primary research questions is:

How can account-based marketing be designed in the case company which operates in B2B market characterized by close personal relationships and long sales cycles?

From this, several sub questions are then developed. These are:

What is account-based marketing as a concept?

What is the current view of the customer buying behavior, and how account-based marketing can be used to target buyers?

How can sales processes be aligned with buying processes with account-based marketing?

By answering these key research questions, the thesis aims at modeling an account-based marketing strategy that can be implemented by the case company

1.3 Literature review

Account-based marketing has links to customer relationship management as Payne and Frow (2004) argue that customer relationship management is an approach to combining new marketing theories and information technology for the sole purpose of delivering profitable customer relationships. Account-based marketing attempts to align sales and marketing to reach the same objectives by developing a targeted marketing program focused on key accounts or specific accounts in a target segment. (Marketo, 2017a, LinkedIn, 2016). Due to the rise on marketing automation software, crafting targeted marketing campaigns in the digital landscape is not as resource intensive compared to 10-20 years ago. The Strategic Account Management Association (SAMA) and Storbacka (2016) state that various different information technology vendors are enabling the adoption of account-based marketing because detailed prospecting tools, predictive analytics, and content delivery vendors are easier to implement in organizations. The purpose of account-based marketing is to drive engagement within the buying center (LinkedIn, 2016; Martin, 2016). However, account-based marketing as a framework is very practitioner oriented and has not been studied in research with those exact words. On the other hand, several underlying key concepts surrounding account-based marketing has been studied including one-to-one marketing, content marketing and marketing automation, social media, industrial sales process, value-based selling, value propositions, customer buying behavior, and customer relationship management.

One-to-one marketing shares similar ideas with account-based marketing and before the turn of the millennium research was conducted in one-to-one marketing. One-to-one marketing originates from business-to-consumer markets but is related to account-based marketing and customer relationship management. Peppers, Rogers, and Dorf (1999) argued that one-to-one marketing is the willingness of a company to adapt company behavior based on the individual requirements of the potential customer and argue that one-to-one marketing is a synonym for relationship marketing or customer relationship management. Khan, Lewis and Singh (2009, 1) study one-to-one marketing in relation to mass marketing or segment based marketing and how one-to-one marketing relates to financial benefits and computational challenges. Also, Fowler, Pitta and Leventhal (2013) study how one-to-one marketing has been affected by technological change based on reported advancements in social media and information technology. Furthermore, with recent technological developments in marketing

automation, prospect tracking software, content delivery, and CRM-software implementing one-to-one marketing is more scalable than ever before (SAMA and Storbacka, 2016). Rust and Voerhoef (2005) imply that one-to-one marketing is the ultimate form of customer relationship management while companies struggle in personalizing marketing interventions.

Content marketing and marketing automation are important key concepts in account-based marketing as account-based marketing uses both tactics to deliver engagement with targeted accounts (Marketo, 2017a; LinkedIn 2016). Content marketing in social media has been studied from the content generation perspective because of the role social media plays in personal relationships and interactions in business-to-business markets (Huotari, Ulkuniemi, Saraniemi, Mäläskä, 2015, 761). Holliman and Rowley (2014, 269) study content marketing in business-to-business markets through semi-structured interviews across five industrial sectors and find business-to-business content marketing is an inbound marketing technique effected by corporate websites, social media and value-added content. It is useful in achieving a trusted brand status that requires a shift from a selling focus to that of helping customers. These discussions have led to the study conducted by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016, 164) whom review corporate sales processes, marketing automation and content marketing and study the role of content marketing in marketing automation in the business-to-business sales context. Furthermore, digital communication channels are a growing consideration for many business-to-business companies as purchasers increasingly rely on information that is accessible on the internet. Content marketing can be defined as the creation and distribution of relevant, compelling and timely content for engaging customers at the appropriate time of their buying process (Holliman and Rowley, 2014, 285). Grossberg (2016, 20) argues that digital technologies are adopted by companies frantically and account-based marketing often requires adopting or developing the marketing technology stack that a company has.

Account-based marketing uses Web 2.0 technologies to promote content across multiple channels. With the rise of Web 2.0, the perception of communication has shifted from one-way communication to two-way interaction where buyers for example interact with content online. (Siamagka, Christodoulous, Michaelidou, Valvi, 2015, 89; Lacka and Chong, 2016, 90) Based on the technology acceptance model and resource-based theory of the firm Siamagcka et. al, (2015, 89-90) develop a conceptual model for social media adoption by business-to-business companies through triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data.

On the other hand, Lacka and Chong (2016, 80) also use the technology acceptance model and combine it with Nielsen's Model of Attributes of System Accountability and conduct an empirical investigation on social media use and adoption by business-to-business marketing professionals. Lacoste (2016, 33) conduct a qualitative study using interviews to research how social media is being used by key account managers. Social media has a large role in account-based marketing.

Account-based marketing also considers the sales implications. Using multiple regression Guesalga (2016, 71) studies social media usage in sales and identify that in the business-to-business context it has multiple purposes. For example, it can be used to target new business partner, and for example LinkedIn, a professional social network website, allows for the personal targeting of advertisements by making advertising visible to only prospects based on their experience such as job function, role or seniority (LinkedIn, 2017). LinkedIn (2017) has also developed their own account-based marketing tool further demonstrating the increasing role that social media plays in the online business-to-business environment. Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch (2017, 118-119) develop propositions that show that social media has shifted the balance of power in regards to control of a shared reality and the individuals ability to express a brand narrative forcing organization to shift their thinking from a relational to an interactionist orientation that crosses venues and media. Based on these studies there is a gap in literature that attempts to see how social media can be used as a marketing channel to support marketing and sales processes.

Account-based marketing is conceptually related to prior literature on value communication and value leverage for connecting with prospects because account-based marketing heavily uses sales people's knowledge as they "have the best insight and opportunities to both create value for customers and appropriate value for sellers" (Jaakkola, Frösén, Tikkanen, 2015, 114). Managing the value exchange that occurs in business relationships has become an increasingly researched topic as a result of organizational buyers looking for optimal solutions that derive long-term benefits, in other words, capture more value. Terho, Haas, Eggert and Ulaga (2012, 178) identify that value-based selling focuses on exemplifying the benefits that occur from the value-in-use, or the value that the customer receives from using the product or service and study value-based selling implementation at the sales force level utilizing in-depth interviews with sales managers across various industries. Töytäri and Rajala (2015, 101) link value-based selling to the knowledge that exists on value creation

and capture by studying organizational capabilities that contribute to customer-perceived value utilizing a multiple case studies that consisted of interviews, focus groups, benchmarking workshops, and reviews of value assessment tools. Based on this review a critical aspect both papers argued was that communication of value is a critical component in value-based selling and composes a large focus area in account-based marketing.

Account-based marketing relies on communicating value propositions to targeted customers and various researchers have also investigated value proposition development. The basic models of value propositions proposed by Anderson, Narus and von Rossum (2006) are the all benefits (focusing on the benefits of the offering), favorable points of difference (focusing on how the offering is different to competition), and resonating focus (what are the critical aspects of the offering for the customer). These three definitions were proposed as a result of no agreed definitions to what constituted a value proposition in business markets. On the other hand, Skålen, von Koskull and Magnusson (2015, 137) suggest that value propositions are configurations of several different practices and resources. This was the result of conducting an eight-firm study using service-dominant logic from which they developed the anatomy of value propositions. Patala, Jalkala, Keränen, Väisänen, Tuominen and Soukka (2016, 144) coin the term sustainable value proposition and build a framework for building them using two case studies as a basis of research. Similarly, to account-based marketing thinking this value proposition framework realizes that buyers have increasing levels of responsibility and are pressed for time, realizing that buyers want to do business with suppliers that really grasp the buyer's business pain points by delivering value propositions that are simple and captivating (Anderson, Narus, van Rossum, 2006, 94). Payne and Frow (2014, 215) also argue that successful value propositions provide points of differentiation and a foundation for on-going buyer-seller relationships. Sheehan and Bruni-Bossio (2011) iterate a strategy canvas for evaluating value proposition performance.

Understanding the sales process is critical in account-based marketing as the goal is to align sales and marketing to reach similar objectives such as revenue generation from a specific target account. The value-based sales process challenges and solutions have been studied using exploratory action research (Liinamaa, Viljanen, Hurmerinta, Ivanova-Gongne, Luotola and Gustaffson, 2016, 37). Cooper and Budd (2007, 173) conduct a study to develops a normative approach for uniting sales processes with project operations. Additionally, Söhnchen and Albers (2010, 1356) argue that industrial project acquisition has

been neglected in empirical research and study how the project acquisition is structured also considering sales management tactics used in funnel management using a large-scale survey. In industrial sales, projects are complex, include various activities, and can span multiple people and departmental boundaries (Söhnchen and Albers, 2010, 1357; Cooper and Budd, 2007, 174). Account-based marketing uses the sales funnel to target appropriate marketing messages to correct buyers in their stage of the sales funnel.

When designing account-based marketing programs an understanding of customer buying behavior is required. Johnston and Lewin (1996, 1) argue that organization buying behaviors is a complex process that consists of multiple phases and different individuals that can span across organizational departmental boundaries. In addition, buying behavior includes conflicting decision criteria (Webster and Wind, 1996). Johnston and Lewin (1996, 1) analyze and summarize previous research and generate a model for organizational buying behavior. By modeling organizational buying behavior marketers can gain an understanding of the process and craft relevant strategies to target the specific individuals of the decision-making unit with correct information. Webster and Wind (1996, 57) in their seminal paper from 1972 generated a model that contributed to the conversation of the buyer decision making process that was extensive at that time. Furthermore Lau, Goh, and Phua (1999, 573) based on their empirical study of 68 manufacturers in Singapore identified that purchase related factors affect the buying centers structural dimensions. More recent research (Makkonen, Olkkonen, Halinen, 2012, 773) argue that rational linear models of buying behavior are not as useful and apply notions of muddling through to develop a practice-theory framework using a qualitative field study. Information search in industrial buying has also been studied in Brazil by Alejandro, Kowalkowski, Ritter, Marchetti, Prado (2011). By understanding organizational buying behavior, account-based marketing can be used to support sales throughout the purchase process.

As one of the objectives of account-based marketing is to develop customer relationships, an overview of customer relationship management is required. Traditionally companies have been asked to acquire competitor's customers or new customers whom haven't used the company's products or services resulting in the adoption of mass advertising but with recent developments in web technologies companies have the ability to build, nurture, and sustain long-term customer relationships (Winer, 2001, 89-90). However, Payne and Frow (2005) argue that customer relationship management can be defined from a narrow, tactical

definition that deals with implementing a specific technology project to a more strategic one considering managing customer relationships with the purpose of increasing shareholder value. Payne and Frow (2005, 168) argue that customer relationship management is the use of relationship marketing strategies and information technology to create long-term profitable relationships with customers and key stakeholders as it provides enhanced opportunities for data utilization and information for co-creating value with customers. Customer relationship management according to Payne and Frow (2004, 527) unites new marketing thinking with new technologies for long-term customer relationship building and profitability resulting in shareholder value. In this sense, Payne and Frow (2005, 167) develop a novel conceptual framework for customer relationship management based on literature from customer relationship management and relationship marketing and as such is related to account-based marketing.

Account-based marketing heavily relies on marketing technologies while technology enabled customer relationship management has been studied by various researchers. O'Leary, Rao and Perry (2004, 338) studied the role of customer information in database marketing processes as a method for enhancing customer relationships. Also, e-Marketing capabilities have been studied in terms of firm performance and customer relationship management from the customer retention and satisfaction perspective (Trainor, Rapp, Beitelspacher, Schillewaert, 2011, 162). Furthermore, marketing capabilities have been studied from the role of information technology by supporting customer relationship management (Wang, Hu, Hu, 2013, 336). O'Leary, Rao, and Perry (2004, 339) develop a three stage model for incorporating internet and database marketing to improve customer relationship management that is divided into inputs, processes and outputs. Inputs are internet information about customers that is gathered from the internet. Customer knowledge according to O'Leary, Rao and Perry (2004, 339) is then processed by identification, standardization and consolidation where records are stored in a data warehouse that can be updated automatically by cookie, internet protocol, or web form log-in. Finally, data can then be processed into strategy output by data mining (O'Leary, Rao, Perry, 2004, 340). This data can be used to build long-term one-to-one customer relationships adding value to both the customer and the company through the use of information technology. Data-driven marketing is an integral part of account-based marketing as the collection of customer data drives increased information to sales and marketing (Marketo, 2017a).

In terms of e-marketing capabilities, Trainor, Rapp, Beitelspacher, and Schillewaert (2011, 162) define e-marketing as a broad set of interaction-enabling technologies that are frequently used in industrial business-to-business markets that include customer relationship management software, sales force automation, e-commerce websites and extranets. The key premise of e-marketing is the fostering of interactions between customers and the company that allow for customers to access company resources and information while simultaneously enabling the company to obtain information about its' customers (Trainor, Rapp, Beitelspacher, Schillewaert, 2011, 163-164). In this sense, e-marketing capabilities extend beyond advertising and communication platforms to also include technologies that support marketing functions. E-marketing capabilities according to Trainor, Rapp, Beitelspacher, and Schillewaert (2011, 164) can be divided into three complementary resources; these are IT resources, human resources and business resources. IT- resources is the deployment of technology infrastructure for the purpose of supporting e-marketing capabilities that facilitate rich dialogues and interactions with customers. Human resources are represented by the managerial support for technological initiatives and a culture for embracing these initiatives inside the organization. Finally, business resources reflect the extent to which technology is integrated throughout the whole organization. This also shares similar insights with account-based marketing where IT-resources (CRM-software and marketing automation) are deployed for aligning sales and marketing (business resources) for mutual goal and objective setting through management support (human resources). The goal is increase sales efficiency and organizational efficiency through customer information dissemination by utilizing information technology. As argued by Wang and Hu (2013 336-337) information technology enables companies to process market signals and enhance customer relationships by evaluation of strategic customers, accumulation of customer knowledge through demographic and behavioral data, and creation of higher customer value resulting in improved customer intimacy, anticipation of market changes, and enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty.

1.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is identified in Figure 1.

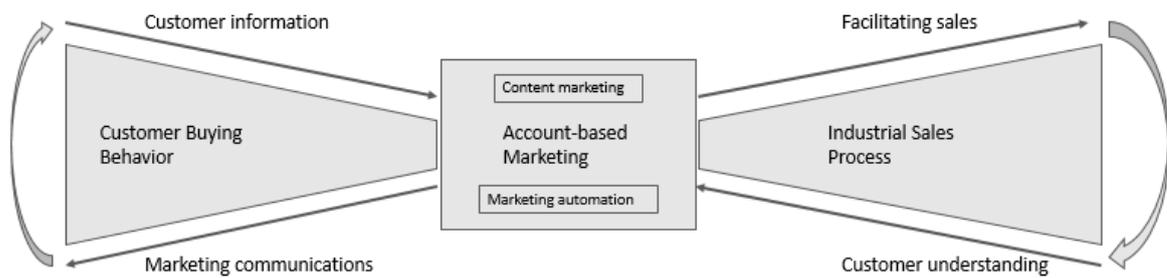


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

As can be seen from the framework, account-based marketing is situated in the middle of in between customer buying behavior and the industrial sales process. This is because the goal of account-based marketing is to facilitate customer buying behavior and the industrial sales process to result in a purchase by the customer and a sale for the company. Account-based marketing heavily relies on content marketing which utilizes value-based communications and marketing automation, and as such these two are situated inside account-based marketing. At the outskirts, we see different arrows. Starting from the customer, account-based marketing requires an information about the customer for planning an account-based marketing program together with sales leading to facilitation of sales activities. On the other hand, sales representatives usually have the best knowledge about customer's which feeds into the design of the account-based marketing program through creating content that is based on understanding of customer's business problems. This understanding about customers is then used to create marketing communications that utilize content and marketing automation targeted at specific accounts. By tracking how customer respond to marketing communications online, information about customer's increases by knowing which content pieces and websites for example have the most views and downloads. The knowledge gained from tracking online behavior and how prospects are reacting in sales meetings with sales representatives increases cohesion between sales and marketing. As such, account-based marketing can be seen as an on-going marketing program.

1.5 Key definitions

Next, an overview of key definitions will be presented that should be used to frame theoretical discussions that exist.

Account-based marketing: Account-based marketing is the treatment of customers as markets of one with the focus of investing marketing resources into the target accounts

instead of using mass advertising tactics to drive sales. By close collaboration between sales and marketing, marketing resources are invested into the most strategic accounts for developing orchestrated marketing campaigns set on specific account objectives agreed upon by sales and marketing. In essence account-based marketing is implementing one-to-one marketing tactics online through mutual sales and marketing objectives based on defined target accounts through detailed understanding of customer buying behavior. Account-based marketing heavily relies on marketing automation, content marketing, and online marketing channels such as email and social media. (Marketo, 2015; LinkedIn, 2016, SAMA and Storbacka, 2016, Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016)

Strategic Account: Strategic accounts are any accounts where there are any additional activities or special organizational structures present for the management of those accounts. In other words strategic accounts are accounts where there is an increased amount of resources invested (Sullivan, Peterson, Krishnan, 2012, 168). In essence strategic accounts are customers where there are arrangements that are out of the norm for a company.

Organization Buying Behavior: As argued by both Webster and Wind (1996) and Johnston and Lewin (1996) organization buying behavior is a complex process that consists of multiple different stages, spans across various different departments and is governed by a buying decision making unit that composes of individuals whom hold different roles. Organization buying behavior is often defined by the amount of purchase related risk that occurs during the buying process. Often the decision-making unit is also influenced by various different forces that include environmental, organizational, purchase and product, informational, and conflict characteristics.

Sales Process and Funnel: The sales process is a process that consists of several different stages that includes screening, approach, presentation, offer design, negotiation, and closing where a feedback loop exists based on outcomes from the different phases. Furthermore, the sales process can be viewed as a sales funnel that is divided into suspects, prospects, leads and sales (Söhnchen and Albers, 2010; Cooper and Budd, 2007; Liinamaa et. al, 2016; D’Haen and Van den Poel. 2013; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). It should be emphasized that the sales process and funnel may be different depending on each company and their definitions of the different phases.

Marketing Automation: Marketing automation is software that can be used to automate specific marketing tasks such as email, social media, and website actions for streamlining lead generation, segmentation, lead scoring and qualification, customer lifecycle marketing, customer retention and customer return on investment (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Marketing automation requires a central marketing database and a focused marketing engine for creating, managing and automating marketing processes across offline and online channels (Marketo, 2017b). Account-based marketing heavily relies on marketing automation because marketing automation allows for scaling of specific interactions that may occur with specific decision makers inside target accounts.

Prospect: Prospects are potential customers whom have met certain predefined criteria, set by the marketer (D’haen, Van den Poel, 2013, 545).

Lead: A lead is any prospect that is often attached to a sales opportunity (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016, 166). Defining when prospects convert to leads has been proven to be challenging in business to business markets where crucial characteristics that have been identified include the source of the prospect, prospects need and degree of urgency, authority of decision making, willingness to provide information, and whom initiated the contact. In this sense, a prospect can be converted into a lead online when for example a prospect submits their contact information in a “leave your contact information and sales will call you back in 48 hours” type of information submission form online requiring qualification by sales personnel.

1.6 Delimitations

As was explained in the background to the topic section of the thesis, there are several key characteristics that are important for account-based marketing design. (Compton, 2016, 23) First of all, account-based marketing is more suitable in business-to-business markets characterized by high-value products or services with long consideration-to-purchase cycles. In addition, there should be an eagerness to understand individual buyer challenges and experiences as they are instead of how the seller perceives them. Thus the first delimitation is that business-to-consumer markets are ignored in this thesis.

Value-based selling which is a key theory around sales management literature is included in this thesis concentrating on how organizations demonstrate value. This results in a brief review of value proposition literature. However, sales controls and sales representative

behaviors when interacting with customers fall outside the scope of this study. Additionally, key account management and its implementation also are outside the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, due to time constraints of the case company and researcher implementing and account-based marketing program is also another delimitation. This study focuses on how an account-based marketing program could be designed in a case organization, but does not move past this into implementing it. However, this is a potential avenue of future research where processes, tools and organizational roles in implementation of account-based marketing is studied.

1.7 Methodology

As argued by Yin (2003, 1-2) a case study provides an excellent opportunity to study and retain whole and meaningful characteristics of real life events. How and why questions as argued by Yin (2003, 6) are exploratory and are likely to lead to using case studies in research. Additionally, the researcher in this context is not directly in control of behavior, but merely as a participant in the study of how an account-based marketing program can be designed resulting in using participant observation as one of the data collection methods. This can be illustrated by a simple example. A researcher in participant observation can work as a liaison between the case company and an outside consultant observing the development process and managing the process of bringing the correct people together. In this sense, the researcher does not have control of the behaviors of the participants in the process, but is a mere observer of how events unfold and progress providing excellent empirical material for studying. In this sense the defining feature of research is what is studied (Myers, 2009, 73) which in this case is how an account-based marketing program can be designed in the case company.

What is important to emphasize that as the researcher is employed by the organization meaning that participant observation will be the primary form of evidence collection. (Yin, 2003, 94) As a participant observer the researcher can take on a variety of roles. Yin (2003, 94) argues that the participant observation technique has frequently been used in anthropological studies as well as using it in more common settings such as a large organization. Due to the researcher being a part of the research issue in the case organization it allows for gaining access to events, groups, and individuals that may be unavailable in other research methods. In this case, the researcher has access unique events such as a

workshop on account-based marketing in the case company, in addition to facilitating meetings with different stakeholders during the development process which can be classified as minor manipulations, and access to various archival records and documentation. In conclusion as argued by Yin (2003, 94) participant observation may sometimes be the only way of collecting evidence; by being a part of the research phenomenon being studied.

There is one important drawback when relying on participant observation which a researcher must be aware of. (Yin, 2003) One of the most important drawbacks is researcher bias as a result of vested interest by being a part of the process, however by openly testing for bias during the research project this bias that occurs should be mitigated. Also, this research follows the single-case study lines of inquiry. Primarily, following the argumentation of Yin (2003, 42) single case studies are suitable when the study is revelatory in nature in which the investigator has the opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon. Yin (2003, 45) argues that single-case studies are appropriate when the case represents a critical test of existing theory, a rare or unique circumstance, a representative or typical case, when the case is revelatory, or the case is longitudinal. However, single case studies can be limited in scope. In conclusion, as the single-case study take place cross-sectionally within a certain context with the aim of studying the account-based marketing process thus relying inductive logic. However, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007, 489) proposes that qualitative research likely combine both inductive and deductive approaches and this should not surprise the researcher in question.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The remaining of this thesis is structured as follows. The thesis continues with a review of organizational buying behavior and industrial sales literature in business-to-business. This includes discussion on organizational buying behavior, industrial sales processes, and value-based selling. These theories are discussed in order to provide a basis for understanding the role of customer buying behavior and how that translates to sales in organizations. This is followed by a review of account-based marketing and its basic concepts which includes a review of literature on digital marketing. Account-based marketing relies heavily on marketing automation and content marketing and thus a discussion of these is included in that section. That section is concluded by a brief review of customer strategy which is linked to customer relationship management literature.

This is followed by an overview of the research design, methodology and process, which outlines the method of research, data collection methods, data analysis and the research process is outlined. This then leads into the empirical part of the study, where the results and findings are presented with linkages to theories reviewed in organizational buying and industrial sales, and account-based marketing as it relates to digital marketing. The thesis ends with conclusions that include theoretical contributions, managerial implications, limitations, and an agenda for further research.

2 Organizational buying behavior and sales in industrial markets

Sales management is facing a transformation from being transactional-oriented to more relationship-oriented (Moncrief and Marshall, 2005, 14). First of all, expectations of customers are increasing combined with easy access to vast amounts of information empowering buyers to be more selective. Furthermore, value-based thinking is increasingly becoming the norm in industrial exchanges shifting perspectives to customer value management (Töytäri and Rajala, 2015, 101). Industrial buyers look for the best total solution and maximum long-term benefits for their organizations emphasizing value communication to key decision makers. Furthermore, in project based businesses industrial projects are complex consisting of different activities, customization for the customer, and have organizational impacts due to the long-term nature of sales (Söhnchen and Albers, 2010, 1357; Cooper and Budd, 2007, 174). This warrants consideration of decision making unit and organizational buying behavior literature.

2.1 Organizational buying behavior

Organization buying behavior is often complex, consists of multiple different phases, spans across various departments, and involves multiple different people (Johnston and Lewin, 1996, 1) where conflicting decision criteria is typically present (Webster, and Wind, 1996, 52). Webster and Wind (1996, 52) argue that modeling customer buying behavior assists marketers to create strategies for targeting key individuals inside the buying center. By modeling customer buying behavior marketers can create informational content for the buying center exerting seller influence inside the buying center. First and foremost, marketers need to realize that they market to individuals, not an abstract organization (Webster and Wind, 1996). As the buying decision making unit is composed of individuals each with their own aspirations and objectives in regards to the purchase, marketers need to be aware that these are the individuals that should be under marketing activities.

2.1.1 Organizational buying process

In practice the buying process in its simplest form composes of several steps represented as a sequence of activities which can be viewed in linear fashion. (Johnston and Lewin, 1996,

2; Webster and Wind, 1996, 55; Makkonen, Olkkonen, Halinen, 2012, 773) However, not all business decisions are systematically evaluated in a linear fashion illustrating the back and forth that occurs during the buying process. As argued by Johnston and Lewin (1996, 2) the process starts with need recognition where a problem exists and consequent identification of a need for a solution for the problem. Next, the characteristics of the solution are identified, in other words, what do we require of the solution is defined. This is followed by an information search for potential sources of solutions. Here, a recognition that alternative solutions to fix the problem may exist. This is followed by proposal acquisition and analysis by the customer. Next, proposals are evaluated and supplier/s are selected. Finally, the suppliers are evaluated based on performance and a feedback loop exists for future buying decision determination. However, Makkonen, Olkkonen, and Halinen (2012, 774) argue that the organizational buying process is not linear but involves incremental independent solutions to problems with the aim of reaching a satisfactory solution bounded in rationale of real-life practice. This implies that buyers are unaware of complete outcomes of their buying decisions which result in new problems that need to be solved incrementally (Makkonen, Olkkonen, Halinen, 2012, 778). However, their views share similar characteristics to linear buying processes where buying is embedded into the different contexts in which the firm operates, such as the outside environment.

The buying center is influenced by various different forces, which include environmental, organizational, purchase/product, group, seller, informational and conflict negotiation characteristics (Johnston and Lewin, 1996, 2). Environmental characteristics are those that exists outside the firm, such as political, competitor, and technology characteristics that put pressure on the company. The buying center is also influenced by organizational characteristics such as the size, structure, technology and objectives of the company. Thirdly, as buyers are individuals (Johnston and Lewin, 1996, 2) individual characteristics also play a role that include experience of the individual and their motivation for example. Furthermore, as argued by Johnston and Lewin (1996, 2) the product or solution characteristics also play a role in relation to prior experiences and complexity involved with using the product. In addition, seller characteristics also have role such as ability to meet predetermined delivery times, quality of the solution, and after-sales service. More specifically, the characteristics of the buying group also has an influence in the buying process which include the authority if the group, objectives of the group, previous experience

and structure of the group. Finally, information and conflict negotiation also play a role (Johnston and Lewin, 1996, 2). In accordance with these notions the amount, type, and source of information play a role purchasing behavior, as well as how conflicts inside the buying group are resolved.

Buyers rely on two general sources of information which can be categorized as commercial and personal sources of information (Alejandro, Kowalkowski, Ritter, Marchetti, Prado, 2011, 18). Furthermore, buyers are likely to use commercial sources of information during the earlier stage of the buying decision process and then rely on personal sources as the decision progresses forward. Information that is provided by a trusted party is valued more by the buying firm and this reliance on personal and commercial sources of information increases when conflict and complexity associated with the purchase increases. Additionally, as economic risks increase, the trust placed in commercial and personal sources of information also increases. (Alejandro, Kowalkowski, Ritter, Marchetti, Prado, 2011, 18) A key consideration is that buyers may not fully trust all of the content that is presented to them. These arguments show the variance that occurs in buyer's use of information in customer buying behavior.

2.1.2 Roles inside the buying center

The buying center can also be composed and influenced by specific role types. Webster and Wind (1996, 56) classify these roles into users, buyers, influencers, deciders and gatekeepers. First, users are those individuals who use the purchased product and service. Conflict in this stage may occur when a buying company does not consult users, and make a purchase decision that does not match the need of the users. The second role is the buyer, and these are individuals whom have the formal responsibility and authority to contract suppliers. Next, influencers are also present whom can sway decisions one way or another based on direct or indirect influence (Webster and Wind, 1996, 56). Primarily they have information and criteria for purchase evaluation of alternative solutions to the problem. Deciders are those with the authority to make the final judgement of choosing alternative buying actions. Finally, gatekeepers are controllers of information and materials into the buying center. In the buying center, an individual person may have more than one role.

Additional considerations according to Webster and Wind (1996, 56) include the dyadic interactions that occur between the individuals that compose the buying center including

sales representative interactions and the functioning of the group as a whole. However, interactions and dynamics between the key people involved can be difficult to map, especially inside the buying center (Johnston and Bonoma, 1981, 144). Johnston and Bonoma (1981, 154) also found that the more complex the purchase is the amount of lateral and vertical involvement increased. Lateral involvement is the amount of different departments or divisions that are involved in the purchase process. Vertical involvement is the level of organizational hierarchical authority that is involved during the purchase process exerting influence and communicating with the buying center. (Johnston and Bonoma, 1981, 146) This demonstrates the variability that may occur in complex purchase decisions.

2.1.3 Purchase risk and complexity

Johnston and Lewin (1996, 8) argue that variation in the buying behavior can be traced back to the level of risk associated with the purchase and can be illustrated as a continuum from low to high risk. Purchase risk typically refers to the importance of the purchase, the complexity associated with the purchase, the results uncertainty associated with the purchase, and the time pressures associated with making a purchase decision (Johnston and Lewin, 1996, 8). Furthermore, any number of variables can influence the risk involved in the purchase, but most variables fall inside the environmental, organizational or purchase dimensions. Additional considerations according to Johnston and Lewin (1996, 8) include the buyer-seller relationship level in the purchase and the channel communications that exist.

As argued by Johnston and Lewin (1996, 8) purchase related risk increases when the buying center becomes larger and complex as there will be different people involved with different opinions and negotiation power inside the buying center. Furthermore, the characteristics of the buyers will play an important role and participants who possess vast prior experience will increase the complexity of the purchase process. This coupled with the importance of the purchase increase complexity. In terms of information search, Johnston and Lewin (1996, 8) reason that the riskier the purchase the amount of information sources used increases and relying on impersonal noncommercial sources is combined with a variety of alternative information sources during the early stages of the purchase process. Moreover, the nature of the purchase situation is deemed to be more complex the buying center is larger accompanied by increased lateral and vertical involvement (Lewin and Donthu, 2005, 1387). As the purchase becomes more complex, uncertain, and is increasingly under time pressures information search is increasingly active in customer buying behavior (Alejandro,

Kowalkowski, Ritter, Marchetti, Prado, 2011, 17). Finally, buyer-seller relationships and communication networks become increasingly important during the buying process in high risk purchase situations (Johnston and Lewin, 1996, 19). For example, products and services of a supplier whom has a proven track record of delivering products and services reduces perceived risks while deep communication networks facilitate information exchange fostering cooperation between the parties further reducing purchase risk.

2.2 Industrial sales process and funnel

Industrial sales processes and the sales funnel have been studied from various different perspectives. For example, Söhnchen and Albers (2010, 1356) study industrial project acquisition process while Liinamaa, Viljanen, Hurmerinta, Ivanova-Gongne, Luotola and Gustaffson (2016, 37) study value-based solution selling. In addition, the sales funnel has been studied from a project operations management context (Cooper and Budd, 2007, 173). A common characteristic in industrial sales is that uncertainty is often high as these projects are complex, include various activities, projects are unique as customization for customers is typical, and projects have an impact for an extended period of time as a result of their long-term sales oriented nature (Söhnchen and Albers, 2010, 1357; Cooper and Budd, 2007, 174). From a value-based selling perspective, it is argued by Liinamaa et. al (2016, 39) that an appropriate precontractual integration model is required to align buyer purchasing and seller sales processes, value perceptions and value sharing arrangements. Based on the conceptualizations of the sales process, a model for understanding the sales process is developed and explained in terms of actions and value-based selling objectives as shown in Figure 2.

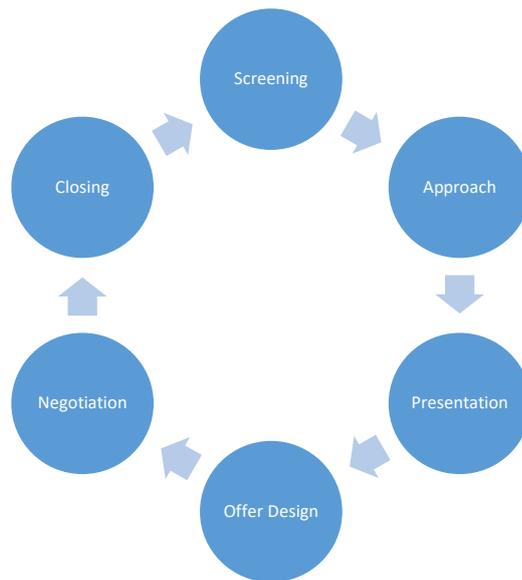


Figure 2: The sales process (adapted from Söhnchen and Albers, 2010, Cooper and Budd, 2007; Liinamaa et. al, 2016)

In the screening process, prospects are identified using public information, internal resources of the supplier and relying on sales representative information. In order to determine an appropriate lead pool, companies can categorize leads by looking at the attractiveness of the lead (Söhnchen and Albers, 2010, 1357; Cooper and Budd, 2007, 176). During the approach stage, companies can use various methods to initiate first contact with the customer including that e-mail, brochures, or the telephone. This is then followed by the presentation of the product or service intended to be sold (Söhnchen and Albers, 2010, 1357; Liinamaa et. al, 2016, 45). The next step in the sales process is to design the offer for the customer. During the negotiation phase, any objections and problems need to be addressed. In the last phases, the prospect is moved into the closure phase. It needs to be considered that sales management and the customer can choose which projects to undertake and which projects to complete. Regardless of the process outcome, a feedback loop about the experiences gained in the process should be present for modifying the sales process, and a complete termination of the relationship is not wise (Cooper and Budd, 2007, 177; Söhnchen and Albers, 2010, 1358). Instead, these sleeping relationships need to be maintained to increase future opportunities to sell projects.

2.2.1 Sales funnel

D’Hoen and Van den Poel (2013, 545) illustrate the sales funnel in four specific stages. At the top of the funnel are the suspects which are all of the potential new customers and in a

business to business environment it usually is a limited listed of potential companies whom sales are targeted towards. From the sales process perspective, screening should be done in this phase. After the screening process, the suspects are turned into prospects based on company specific criteria. D’Hoen and Van den Poel (2013, 545) then argue that prospects are turned into leads by a qualification process. Leads are prospects that will be contacted. From a sales process perspective, here key actions are the approach and value mapping. When the leads buy a product or service they become customers. Typical actions in between this stage are presentations, offer design, negotiation and closing of the sale. D’Hoen and Van den Poel (2013, 545) argue that this process is iterative and dynamic where the sales funnel is altered throughout the process of moving customers through the funnel as a result of rejection of company services or conversion of suspects into customers. The sales funnel is presented in the figure below, while Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) illustrate the funnel bit differently as can be seen in Figure 6.



Figure 3: The sales funnel (adapted from D’Hoen and Van den Poel, 2013, 545)

2.2.2 The customer loop

Leibtag (2013, 38) argues that the classic sales funnel can be viewed from a customer-centric perspective that transforms the sales funnel into a customer loop. Here, the sales funnel is transformed into an on-going cycle as shown in Figure 4.

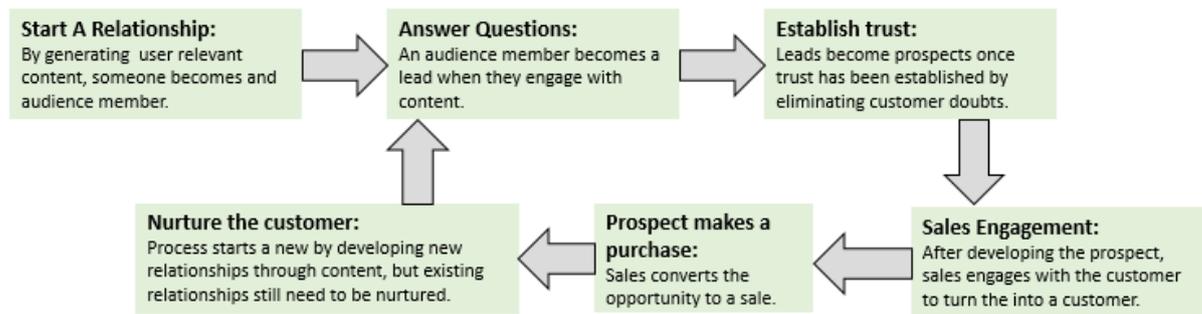


Figure 4: The customer loop (adapted from Leibag, 2013, 38)

Similarly to account-based marketing, this cycle can be reflected as generating unique content with customer specific value propositions targeted as key decision makers and influencers in the buying journey. By examining the position of the customer in the content loop, the marketer can support the buyer in their buying journey (Leibag, 2013, 76). By reflecting the buying journey, the marketer is able to evaluate the right content mix in order to nurture decision makers supporting sales.

2.3 Understanding value propositions and value-based selling

Another aspect that is relevant in account-based marketing is how firms develop resonating value propositions, as these are communicated to customers before a purchase takes place. This then links into how value is communicated in value-based selling. Terho, Haas, Eggert and Ulaga (2012, 17) studied the relationship that occurs when value-based activities are implemented in the sales force level. Also, value-based selling has been researched as an organizational capability (Töytäri and Rajala, 2015, 101). The primary driver for implementing value-based selling at the sales force level as been the shift away from individual relationship focused selling to that of managing reoccurring customer value also known as customer value management. This has been the result of industrial buyers looking for optimal solutions that derive long-term benefits capturing more value (Töytäri, and Rajala, 2015, 101). According to Jaakkola, Frösén, and Tikkanen (2015, 113) suppliers help their customers to create more value, but they conduct these behaviors themselves to also capture a part of the value as it helps them translate this created value into sustainable competitive advantages and superior performance. At the core of value-based selling is the value-in-use domain, in other words how the use of the solution generates benefits for the customer (Terho, Haas, Eggert, Ulaga, 2012, 178) that requires deep insight into the customer's business objectives, earning logic, and solution fit.

Value propositions are an important aspect of business, while Payne and Frow (2014, 214) argue that most companies often lack clearly articulated value propositions where value propositions are not formally developed, communicated, and used even though companies use the term frequently. Value proposition development in the context of account-based marketing acts as the cornerstone for developing content aimed at key decision makers that compose of the decision-making unit (Payne and Frow, 2014, 214, Terho, Haas, Eggert, Ulaga, 2012; Töytäri and Rajala, 2015; Skålén, Gummerus, von Koskull, Magnusson, 2015, 137). Value propositions themselves are an integral process in customer relationship management (Payne and Frow, 2014, 214), and Anderson, Narus, van Rossum (2006, 92) develop three perspectives to value proposition development.

2.3.1 Developing value propositions

The all benefits value proposition model according to Anderson, Narus, and van Rossum (2006, 93) consists of showing all the benefits the customer receives from the offering. This requires the knowledge of the market offering of the focal company and a negative downside of benefit assertion. This line of thought requires the least amount of knowledge about customers and competitors with a focus on benefit assertion however, due to the lack of knowledge about customers these benefits may not be realized from the customer's perspective (Anderson, Narus, van Rossum, 2006, 92). This is closely tied to the points of parity element, where essentially the same performance can be achieved by the next best alternative (Anderson, Narus, van Rossum, 2006, 94). In practice, this means that a competitor can have a similar solution resulting in the same benefits leading to ineffective value propositions.

The favorable points of difference is another value proposition development framework (Anderson, Narus, van Rossum, 2006, 93) that considers all favorable points of difference of the market offering in relation to other alternatives. This requires knowledge of the market offering and the next best alternative. However, understanding favorable points of difference does not convey value to the target customer, and there may be multiple points of difference resulting in confusion for the customer where comprehension of which solution delivers the highest value is limited (Anderson, Narus, van Rossum, 2006, 94). This can result in value presumption, where the supplier believes that their points of difference generate value for the customer but in reality, they do not.

Anderson, Narus and van Rossum, 2006, 94) argue that the gold standard of value propositions is the resonating focus value proposition. The value proposition framework focuses on the one or two points of difference that deliver the greatest value to the customer for the foreseeable future (Anderson, Narus, van Rossum, 2006, 93). This requires knowledge of the how focal company market offering delivers superior value to customers compared to the next best alternative, requiring extensive customer research. Similarly to account-based marketing thinking this value proposition framework realizes that buyers have increasing levels of responsibility and are pressed for time, realizing that buyers want to do business with suppliers that really grasp the buyer's business pain points by delivering value propositions that are simple and captivating (Anderson, Narus, van Rossum, 2006, 94). This requires making value propositions superior based on a few critical elements that matter most to the customer, demonstrating and documenting value and communicating it in a method that relays sophisticated understanding of the customer's business.

Payne and Frow (2014, 215) argue that the value proposition concept consist of three important elements that are critical in the value creation process of customer relationship management. These are determining the value provided to customers, determining the value that is received from customers, and successfully engaging in co-creation maximizing lifetime value of desirable customer segments. Successful value propositions provide differentiation and a foundation for ongoing buyer-seller relationships. (Payne and Frow, 2014, 215) Additionally, the value proposition concept forces an organization to clearly articulate the basis of competition in chosen markets requiring detailed insight into valued benefits from the perspective of customers. Payne and Frow (2014, 215) use the definition of Rintamäki, Kuusela, and Mitronen (2007) to illustrate the value proposition concept whom defines it as "an encapsulation of a strategic management decision on what the company believes its customers value the most and what it is able to deliver that gives it competitive advantage." From a branding perspective, a brand has two specific tasks. (Payne and Frow, 2014, 216) Firstly, the brand creates a relevant and compelling value proposition and secondly, makes the value proposition credible.

In conclusion, using concepts developed by Sheehan and Bruni-Bossio (2015, 317) whom define that a value proposition is a description of the value that the firm promises to consistently deliver to customers; value propositions require customer understanding in terms of their needs, a basic understanding of competing offers, and an in-depth

understanding of company strengths. After selecting the customer's, managers oversee designing offers and selecting attributes that best meet the needs of the targeted customers. Once the total offering is finalized customer value propositions are "developed to communicate how the offering's bundle of attributes effectively solve the target customers' problem and position the offering relative to rival offerings" (Sheehan and Bruni-Bossio, 2015, 317). In order to generate top line growth Sheehan and Bruni-Bussio (2015, 318) argue that companies need to monitor target customer needs and competing value propositions for identifying corporate success in communicating value propositions to customers.

2.3.2 Understanding the customers' business model

First, value-based selling requires a deep understanding of the customer's business model with identification of customer business goals, objectives and earning logic (Terho, Haas, Eggert and Ulaga, 2012, 179-180). Töytäri and Rajala (2015, 104-105) argue that this could be considered as the planning stage in value based selling where target segments are identified and value propositions are crafted to match those target segments. Value analysis can be used to map the real drivers of business value for the customer which can be combined with value proposition development, the next stage, where leveraging company specific competitive advantages is critical. After obtaining an understanding of customer business models and identification of target segment (Terho, Haas, Eggert and Ulaga, 2012; Töytäri and Rajala, 2015), value propositions are crafted based on the previous analysis. Value propositions are developed on the basis of generating substantial positive impact for the customer's business (Terho, et. al, 2012, 180) addressing the unique needs of the target segment (Töytäri and Rajala, 2015, 106).

2.3.3 Communicating value in industrial markets

Communicating the value offering is the next consideration in value-based selling. Terho, Haas, Eggert, and Ulaga, (2012, 181) argue that value communication is "the credible demonstration of the offering's contribution to the customer's business profits." Töytäri and Rajala (2015, 107) identify that value proposition can be communicated and aligned to meet the buyer's perceptions by two methods. Either stakeholders can be influenced to agree with the value proposition or the value-proposition can be adapted to customer and stakeholder goals, incentives, business issues and beliefs. According to Töytäri and Rajala (2015, 107) the degree of adaptation is dependent on the similarity of views among the stakeholders in

the target audience, the supplier's ability to influence and align those views with the value proposition, and the level of involvement by the target customer in developing the value proposition. The seller's main objective in buyer-seller interactions is to build and influence the customer perception of the solution vision by leveraging the seller's strengths eliminating rival solutions before the competitive tendering process begins as a customer problem can have more than one solution. Value communication needs to proactively reduce customer risks for adopting the solution where typical risk reduction strategies include case references demonstrating past success, supplier ability to deliver superior value, and implementation of guarantees to bear some of the customer's risks signaling commitment to deliver superior value (Terho, Haas, Eggert and Ulaga, 2012, 181). Value quantification (Töytäri and Rajala, 2015) is the provision of quantified evidence for the value that is delivered to the customer. With account-based marketing personalized value propositions can be communicated to correct stakeholders whom play different roles in the buying process.

2.3.4 Leveraging value in industrial markets

Finally, value should be leveraged. Töytäri and Rajala, (2015, 108) argue that value verification occurs as suppliers throughout the relationship review, document and verify the value created with the customer. According to Töytäri and Rajala (2015, 108) a database of cases should be created to support organizational learning, provide legitimacy for the value-based approach, build brand awareness, and to provide tools for the early stages of the buying process allowing for customer value experience leverage. Value-based selling could help the conversion rate by significantly helping customers choose correct solutions to meet their needs and facilitating creation of value with the customer helping the customer reach their own business targets and increase relationship value (Terho, Haas, Eggert and Ulaga, 2012, 182). This is accomplished by having an intricate understanding of the customer's business model, crafting appropriate value propositions and credibly demonstrating the value that is delivered. On the other hand, from the organization perspective (Töytäri and Rajala, 2015, 109) value-based selling requires early engagement in the customer's buying process to influence customer's buyer-seller perceived relationship value, expansion of the shared value between the buyer and the seller, and committing to the shared vision of a potential solution which achieves desired value for both parties. Finally, value-based selling helps in the negotiation of prices in business-to-business exchanges by acting as a reference to capture equitable return on the value that is created.

2.3.5 Value-based selling and the sales process

Liinamaa et. al (2016) incorporate value-based selling principles to the sales process discussed previously in the sales process section. In the approach phase the focus is on presenting value potential to the customer (Söhnchen and Albers, 2010, 1357; Liinamaa et. al, 2016, 45). Additional activities may include value mapping. In the presentation phase value-based selling activities include those of disclosing the design for value verification and customization of the value capture model (Söhnchen and Albers, 2010, 1357; Liinamaa et. al, 2016, 45). When designing the offer Liinamaa et. al (2016) argue that that a solution is agreed on including that of technical specifications and scope of services. In the negotiation phase the value of the offering should be reinforced (Söhnchen and Albers, 2010, 1357; Liinamaa et. al, 2016, 45) and in the closure phase the value of the offering matches that of the buyer and an agreement to conduct the project is established.

3 Account-based marketing

At the basis of digital marketing is an understanding of customer buying behavior, and the ability to provide consistent experiences and communication across all channels has been identified to be critical for success (Xu, 2014, 148). The key is to understand this process and map how technologies can assist in the stages of the journey with a focus on engaging with customers across their buying journey. Account-based marketing has various different definitions, for example Crane and Heinz (2017) define it as a strategic approach marketer's use to find, engage, and nurture decision-makers at pre-determined accounts. While LinkedIn (2015) borrows the definition from ITSMA, a research-based membership organization for B2B service marketing, and define it as a strategy that engages sales, marketing, subject matter experts, delivery professionals and key executives in a chosen client account to determine where and how to best meet the client's unique business challenges. With deep insight into the client's business and objectives, this collaborative team creates a well-orchestrated marketing and sales program for the account. This definition illustrates the three critical areas. Account-based marketing combines *sales* and *marketing* for developing a *targeted marketing program* based on *specific accounts* through a detailed understanding of *organizational buying behavior* and the *sales process*. There are several different approaches to ABM (Engman, 2016, Cameron, 2016) due to the availability of digital technologies where a list of prospects in the same industry/segment can for example compose an "account list." However, practitioners such as Engman (2016) argue that ABM is not suitable for the long-tail, while in an article published in CMO (Cameron, 2016) it is stated that if the program is not designed for one account it does not constitute as account-based marketing.

The Strategic Account Management Association (SAMA) with Kaj Storbacka (2016, 54-55) understand account-based marketing as considering and communicating with each prospective or active customer as a market of one, instead of spreading resources thinly based on a predetermined large market segment. Account-based marketing tailors an approach for each account supporting the buyer in the customer buying process to achieve their goals. Furthermore, four critical developments have been identified for driving the implementation of account-based marketing in organizations (SAMA and Storbacka, 2016,

54-55). Firstly, companies are more focused on lifetime value of customers and long-term value creation requiring more comprehensive approaches to individual accounts. Second, developments in IT-technology, especially in marketing automation, CRM-systems and marketing analytics is bringing sales and marketing closer together and these technologies are making account-based marketing scalable. (SAMA and Storbacka, 2016, 54-55) Finally, there are various vendors such as contact and account data vendors providing detailed prospecting tools, predictive analytics vendors using advanced algorithms to determine ideal customer profiles, and content delivery vendors offering ad-servicing and software for facilitating content distribution to targeted accounts making it easy for marketers to obtain account specific insight.

Account-based marketing specifically focuses on sales and marketing efforts that are aligned in understanding the challenges of each contact inside the strategic account aiming to design account-specific action plans, orchestrating coordinated outbound communications, and measuring achieved coverage and levels of engagement inside the account (SAMA and Storbacka, 2016, 56). The buying process becomes very complex, as there can be multiple different stakeholders that are present during the buying process where up to eight people can be making the decision across up to four different departments, not all of which are directly engaged with the supplier company (LinkedIn, 2016; Engman, 2016; Demandbase, 2017; Webster and Wind, 1996, Johnston and Lewin, 1996). This means that business-to-business marketers need to target the wider buying group instead of just the decision makers to create influence in the group as a whole (Webster and Wind, 1996). Account-based marketing is more than just aligning sales and marketing (Marketo, 2017a, 2015); it is selecting target accounts and delivering personalized programs, messages and content to move them to a specific goal.

Account-based marketing shares similar insights with value-based selling. Account-based marketing requires understanding of the customer's business problem requiring input from sales to create target specific value propositions used in value communication. These value propositions are then demonstrated to the customer through engaging content such as case studies that demonstrate past success quantifying the value delivered by the company (Terho et. al, 2012). Typical channels for distributing content includes website, social media, email, but sales is also required to add a personal touch to the message delivered (Marketo, 2017a, Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Here marketing and sales need to ensure that the content is

relevant to the customer in terms of their buying process, segment, or other criteria. Through account-based marketing, the stakeholders can be influenced to agree with the value proposition or the value-proposition can be adapted to customer and stakeholder goals, incentives, business issues and beliefs (Töytäri and Rajala, 2015). Account-based marketing can be a tool of early engagement as argued by (Töytäri and Rajala, 2015) influencing relationship development, expanding shared values and resulting in commitment.

One of the biggest challenges that most companies face is that marketing and sales do not agree on similar objectives and measures of performance (Engeman, 2016). Homburg, Jensen and Krohmer (2008) develop different taxonomies to show sales and marketing interface alignment which resulted in five different approaches to how sales and marketing are organized. This research showed that there is great variance between the roles and responsibilities between sales and marketing where the strongest configurations are characterized by strong links between the two departments, high market knowledge in marketing, and long-term orientation toward sales (Homburg, Jensen, Krohmer, 2008, 146). Account-based marketing can be used as a tactic to drive sales and marketing collaboration by integrating account-specific marketing plans with a sales plans (LinkedIn, 2016, Martin, 2016). The role of marketing is to add insight to the buying process by listening and advocating helping sales to take a long-term perspective of the sales process (Compton, 2016). By conducting customer portfolio analysis, a decision on target accounts can be made to guide marketing resource investments for development of those accounts (Thakur and Workman, 2016). Additionally, by coordinating between the various departments, it enables resources to be invested into those accounts that are strategic driving account objectives, instead of spreading marketing resources thin across all undefined target segments (Marketo, 2015).

3.1 Account-based marketing process

Account-based marketing is similar to one-to-one marketing in the sense that account-based marketing is the building personalized marketing targeted at specific decision makers inside strategic accounts. Peppers, Rogers, and Dorf (1991, 151) argue that one-to-one marketing is the willingness of a company to orient and adapt its' behavior based on an individual customer by using customer insight. At the core this is related to establishing learning relationships with the most valuable customers. One-to-one marketing requires

organizational commitment to understanding each individual customer and treating each customer with the focus of the whole organization (Fowler, Pitta, Leventhal, 2013, 510). Account-based marketing attempts to accomplish this in the digital realm through highly relevant and personalized content aimed at specific decision makers in the decision-making unit facilitating their buying behavior. Advances in marketing technologies such as marketing automation, CRM-software, and the ability to integrate software as presented by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) is making one-to-one marketing in strategic accounts scalable. Rust and Verhoef (2005, 478) touted that visionaries and consultants as early as the 2000's argued one-to-one marketing as the ultimate form of customer relationship management while companies rarely personalized marketing interventions acting as an implementation barrier. Account-based marketing attempts to personalize these interventions where the intervention can be considered as a communication vehicle or channel to promote the company message. By adopting a learning orientation Simonson (2005, 23) marketers can uncover latent preferences and use these to their advantage. Findings by Khan, et. al, (2009, 1077) support the idea that marketing should be adapted to the preferences and phase of the customer buying cycle as customized promotions increased revenue and profitability. The account-based marketing concept is illustrated below.



Figure 5: Account-based marketing concept

Figure 5 illustrates the account-based marketing strategy for both a key account and a group of strategic account, which is the same process for both. An account-based marketing strategy concerns with identifying correct accounts, understanding goals for each identified account, evaluating the tactics required by both marketing and sales, dividing the responsibilities and measuring the impact (LinkedIn, 2016, 12). Here, it is critical for sales and marketing to collaborate on objectives and definitions for the program to be initiated. Furthermore, metrics need to be clarified taking into consideration both sales and marketing perspectives (Marketo 2017a). For example, by specifically focusing on revenue generation, both marketing and sales can see account-based marketing impact. There should be enough valuable information about these customers for identifying touchpoints and mediums used by the customer (Peppers, Rogers, Dorf, 1999, 152).

The second step can be identified as account identification. Accounts can be identified based on The Pareto Rule which identifies that about 80% of profits are generated by 20% of customers (Ryals and Knox, 2001, 538), or using more traditional means of market and customer segmentation (Marketo, 2017a; LinkedIn, 2016; Payne and Frow, 2014). Market segmentation can be defined as the iterative process of examining and grouping potential and actual customers into groups that have similar product needs for targeting using an appropriate marketing mix (Boegaard and Ellegaard, 2010, 1291). Based on this premise, Windler, Jüttner, Michel, Maklan and Macdonald (2017, 174) argue that customers that require industrial solutions can also be segmented using the following criteria: paying and investment behavior, contacts with the customer organization, customer attitude toward the business relationship, customer competence in value co-creation, customer attitude towards joint innovation, and customer industry solution replication potential acting as a customer segmentation framework. In one-to-one marketing customers, can be differentiated by their different levels of value, in other words, targeting the most valuable customers for our business (Peppers, et. al, 1999, 153; Fowler, Pitta, Leventhal, 2013, 510-511). Furthermore, selecting strategic accounts to be included in an account-based marketing program can be conducted using customer portfolio analysis (Johnston and Selnes, 2004; Thakur and Workman, 2016). By conducting segmentation using customer portfolio analysis marketers can direct appropriate levels of resources for growing, retaining, developing the most valued customers allowing for the development of value-oriented relationships (Thakur and Workman, 2016, 4095; Töytäri, Rajala and Keränen, 2017). In this sense, account-based

marketing uses ideas of market and customer portfolio segmentation for choosing strategic accounts for an account-based marketing program.

In account profiling (Marketo, 2017a) key decision makers are identified and personas are created to match their buying journeys. This requires market intelligence from sales to gain intricate understanding of what motivates the buyer for the next phase of the process. Critical for this phase is to understand how decisions are made in the account, which key people play what roles, and mapping pain points of their business sharing similarities with organizational buying behavior theories (Johnston and Lewin, 1996; Webster and Wind, 1996). Value propositions are crafted here based on each specific persona identified which acts as the basis for content strategy formulation. This is illustrated as the decision maker mapping part of the figure. This is followed by the development of a content strategy. In this phase developing appropriate content for each individual persona in the account should be conducted relying content that has been created previously, possibly making minor modifications to the content to increase value proposition-content match. (Simpson, 2017; LinkedIn 2016; Marketo, 2017a). This is used to create a resonating message with each targeted persona. Content and value propositions can be divided according to each personas stage in the buying process, based on account specific firm data, or even the based on the persona itself targeting the roles that these people play in the decision-making unit. Next, a multichannel approach should be used to engage with the different stakeholders identified in the previous stage with the content strategies that were agreed upon (Marketo, 2017a). Here the key consideration is that every touchpoint that the customer comes in contact with should be consistent and complementary requiring marketing channel analysis to identify where the buyers are the most active.

Finally, results are reviewed together with sales and marketing, however, this should consider different time frames from immediate short term orientation to more long-term metrics. (LinkedIn, 2016; Marketo, 2016) In the short term, metrics such as engagement can be tracked, while long-term metrics include new opportunities created and increased understanding of revenue generation by analyzing new opportunities that resulted in sales. Engagement can be defined as a state that arises from experiences with a brand that are often context specific and in this sense is the result of an experience (Calder, Isaac, Malthouse, 2016, 40). These experiences are the result of interacting with a product, brand or service and can affect behavioral variables such as the way a product or service is consumed.

Furthermore, Mintz and Currim (2013, 20) has an exhaustive list of various metrics that can be used to measure the effectiveness of marketing activities that includes metrics such as reach, impressions, click-through rate, and amount of responses.

All of the gathered insights should be shared with the sales department so that they can adapt their sales processes to deliver exact messages to the correct people to deepen the relationship and win the deal (LinkedIn, 2016). Information sharing has been identified as a critical component in marketing and sales interface alignment studies (Homburg, Jensen, Krohmer, 2008, 137), and can vary between organizations depending on marketing and sales interface alignment. In this stage an overview of the account and personas of the buying committee, any up-to-date interactions with the account and the company, unique value propositions and relevant content including the persona and timing of when to use the content should be covered. An important consideration is that the account-based marketing process should be iterative where feedback loops are present for optimization as a smaller amount of prospects allows for an in-depth tracking of metrics (Docurated, 2016, 16). By implementing account based marketing (Demandbase, 2017, 7-8) the company can focus on account data to become owners of the revenue chain with the ability to track potential customers as they move along the sales funnel as identified by Taiminen and Järvinen (see Figure 6). Additionally, by understanding customer buying behaviors the company can sell additional products and services or new solutions to another part of the business.

Account-based marketing is moving towards a customer-centric approach to marketing. (Cameron, 2016) However, it requires an organizational shift away from measuring the effect of a single campaign in terms of ROI for example (Cameron, 2016), to that of focusing on measuring long-term impacts and to focus on three R's of improving customer relationships, increasing reputation, and revenue generation. A critical component of a successful account-based marketing is accurate data, as without good data the correct customers cannot be reached with the correct information. In conclusion, account-based marketing attempts to solve three critical issues (Merkelz, 2007). It first tries to solve the problem of getting the right message to the right people who are potential buyers. Second, it increases engagement by having the right content available to the key accounts minimizing time spent on information search on for example, reference cases from the same industry. Thirdly, it tries to turn high levels engagement into a sales activity quickly instead of reactively waiting for a potential buyer to ask for a white paper.

3.2 The role of marketing automation in account-based marketing

Account-based marketing heavily utilizes marketing automation (SAMA and Storbacka, 2016, 55). This is because marketing automation can be used to track, nurture, and send personalized content to decision makers that compose the decision-making unit. Marketers are relying on data and automation to trigger marketing actions, define target audiences, optimize conversion and generate revenue (Grossberg, 2016, 21). As argued by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016, 165) marketing automation is becoming increasingly important for marketers as it allows for interface alignment between sales and marketing. Marketing automation is software that automates specific marketing tasks such as e-mails, social media and website actions increasing operational efficiency and growing revenues. It streamlines lead generation, segmentation, lead scoring and qualification, customer lifecycle marketing, customer retention and customer return on investment (Hubspot, 2017, Marketo, 2017b). Typical requirements are a central marketing database for storing of data that includes detailed information about prospects including behaviors and interactions used in targeting and segmenting (Marketo 2017b). It also requires an engagement focused marketing engine for creation, management and automation of marketing processes across offline and online channels and an analytics engine for testing, measuring and optimizing marketing return on investment. In the digital realm marketers are able track the type of content that resonate with specific customers and through interaction tracking marketers are able to map consumer paths and automatically personalize content to prospects and customers (Kantrowitz, 2014). This allows for scaling of the processes across various channels accelerating lead qualification processes using lead scoring and nurturing through targeting important buyers with relevant content. This improves lead follow-up activities completed by sales because of lead tracking indicating whether leads are ready to buy. Marketing automation involves a software platform that enables the delivery of content based on specific guidelines set by marketers where social media is considered as a set of channels and platforms to deliver content (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016, 165). By employing marketing automation, marketers attempt to attract, build and maintain trust with prospects and current customers by content that is automatically personalized to customers unique needs. Personalization is defined as the customization of marketing mix elements at an individual scale, and thus the ability to make content more personal increases prospect engagement with that content as it is relevant for them. It is argued that marketing automation uses both active and passive methods of

learning. Active methods include directly asking questions while passive methods include using past internet behavioral data such as transactions and clickstream data. Järvinen and Taiminen (2016, 170) combine marketing automation and the sales funnel into a marketing and sales funnel. Account-based marketing uses marketing automation as it enables marketers to use less resource intensive processes to identify target accounts, create personalized programs and campaigns that are scalable due to automation for engaging with these target accounts. In this sense, the account-based marketing program feeds into marketing automation by considering the prospects, content and interactions that can be automated in social media or e-mail marketing for example. The account-based marketing plan then acts as a guide for planning and implementing marketing automation towards specific decisions makers based on organizational buying behavior.

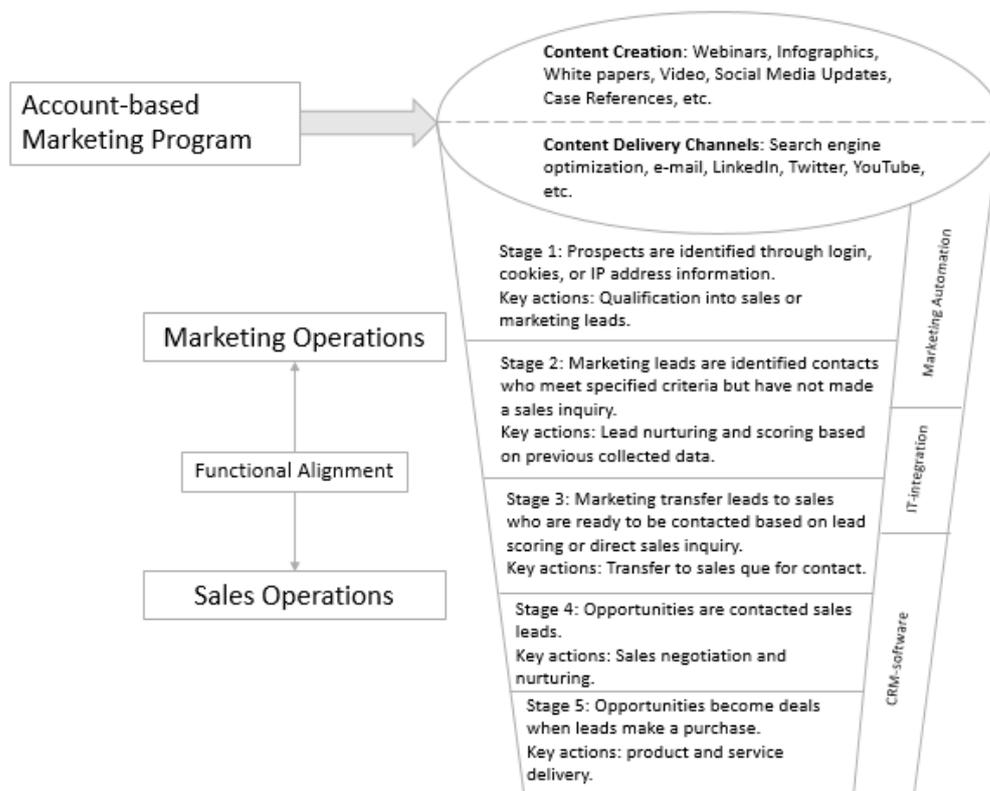


Figure 6: The sales and marketing funnel (adapted from Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016, 170)

It is argued by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016, 173) that content should be aligned to meet customer needs thereby creating value. Additionally, cross collaboration between marketers, subject specialists and sales is required to create effective content at the different stages of

their buying journey, illustrating key ideologies of account-based marketing (Marketo, 2017a; LinkedIn, 2016). Furthermore, content marketing is an effective tool for attracting prospects to view product, service and value offerings and motivating them to identify themselves. This persuasion is important as business-to-business buyers are increasingly active in the early parts of the purchase process especially as it relates to the search for information (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016, 173; Johnston and Lewin, 1998). By incorporating CRM-software, content marketing and marketing automation companies can produce high quality sales leads increasing efficiency as the buyer is more willing to buy when contacted by sales. Behavioral tracking using marketing automation expedites the lead qualification process as it allows for understanding of what products and services are of interest to the prospect. By adopting an integrated sales and marketing funnel, companies can align marketing and sales by fostering cooperation and similar objectives between these two units. Finally, as argued by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016, 172) the path of the customer in the funnel is not as straightforward as it seems as prospects can move back and forth between the different stages in the funnel. As the customer progresses through the funnel, feedback loops should be present and in an ideal case the company can review the whole process from how the prospect was acquired to how the deal was won or lost all the way through the purchase process to further refine the funnel, content, and sales processes.

In practice, as argued by Kantrowitz (2014), marketing automation enables relationship building, content personalization, smart engagement, and predictive analytics. Marketing automation enables relationship building due to its power in influencing the prospective buyer before they reach the sales representative. Furthermore, based on previous actions with the company, marketing automation can trigger specific communications with prospects for performing certain actions. Smart engagement is enhanced by tailoring specific messages based on the prospects position in the customer buying journey. Buyers today are increasingly comfortable with sharing personal information as they view personalized content as a valuable service for them (Simpson, 2017). This combined with lead scoring can be used to determine whether the prospect can be handed off to sales for contact. Finally, the vast amount of data enables marketers to use predictive analytics to determine best potential buyers based on behavioral data. Peppers, Rogers and Dorf (1999, 153) and Fowler, Pitta and Leventhal (2013, 511) argue that directing customers to more automated and less

costly channels cost efficiency is increased resulting in improved marketing return on investment.

3.3 The role of content marketing in account-based marketing

Account-based marketing relies heavily on marketing automation, and marketing automation is useless without content marketing. Business-to-business marketing is increasingly interested in the use of Twitter, LinkedIn, SlideShare among others as they provide a fast and personalized interaction with potential customers, suppliers and other stakeholders deepening relationships. Content marketing is seen as an inbound marketing tactic, also known as “pull-marketing” with the aim of targeting content towards customers that are already searching, reviewing, and defining needs for products and services. (Holliman and Rowley, 2014, 269-270; Huotari, Ulkuniemi, Saraniemi, Mäläskä, 2015, 761) With increased purchase cycles and changing purchase behaviors content marketing is a critical tool to be employed with account-based marketing and marketing automation. Inbound marketing shifts the traditional messaging from product orientation encouraging a customer-centric approach to value propositions that foster trust. The primary drivers for this has been the recent advances in communications and information technology which is modifying search behavior especially related to the interplay between digital communications and customer purchasing decisions (Järvinen and Tamminen, 2016, 164).

Digital content marketing is especially suitable for the business-to-business markets due to longer-term relationship building with customers where co-creation of value occurs in longer, complex, multi-faceted sales cycles requiring a rich repository of information to meet the various information needs during the different stages of the buying cycle. Based on Holliman and Rowley’s (2014, 285) thematic analysis, content marketing is defined as “creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying considerations processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome.” Account-based marketing is about engaging with the correct individuals of the decision-making unit with the correct value propositions matching the customer buying behavior, (LinkedIn, 2016) reflecting ideas presented by Holliman and Rowley (2015). This definition can also be analyzed from a different perspective (Huotari et. al, 2015, 761-762) which also considers the user side of it. User generated content is content that is created by an audience even though it may be

published by a professional company or an agency. Content becomes user generated as the audience can continue their conversation about that content where social media sites allow companies to develop and foster relationships through interactions while these interactions in social media contribute to content creation. As a concept, content marketing is not new as it has been used by companies in trade journals and industry specific magazines, but with the rise of information technologies marketers can target content to individual's specific requirements (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016, 165), sharing ideas presented by account-based marketing.

Additional considerations include the tailoring of content to the specific needs of the target audience, avoiding the recycling of generic selling messages and adopting a publisher's mindset focusing on the key requirements of the audience and developing story telling capabilities. Key objectives of adopting content marketing according to Holliman and Rowley (2014, 286) are lead generation, brand awareness and building, achieving thought leadership and achieving trust. Challenges related to content marketing is developing appropriate metrics dashboards, recruiting individuals capable of storytelling and creating good content, importance of creating relevant content for target customers, and challenging the mindset of executives about the role of marketing such that content marketing is used as a tool to support reputation and partnership building. Account-based marketing is a strategy for finding, engaging, closing and growing strategic accounts that matter (Marketo, 2017a) illustrating the role of content marketing as presented by Holliman and Rowley (2014) in the account-based marketing strategy. Account-based marketing also shares propositions put forth by Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015, 705) whom argue that digital marketing communications is the use of new technologies and channels to create an integrated, targeted, and measurable communications campaign with the aim of brand and awareness building, customer relationship building, and sales lead generation. Content marketing is at the core of account-based marketing as it heavily relates to marketing automation and influencing organizational buying behavior by timely, appropriate, measurable content that is delivered to target members of the decision-making unit, but account-based marketing should be viewed as a longer-term program and not just a single one-off campaign.

3.4 The role of social media in account-based marketing

The use of social media has been analyzed from both the business-to-consumer and business-to-business perspective. Due to the rise of Web 2.0 technologies, a company's ability to interact with existing and prospective customers has changed. This has also increased the importance for marketers to combine online and offline marketing with an increased focus on two-way interaction instead of one-way communication. (Siamagka, Christodoulous, Michaelidou, Valvi, 2015, 89; Lacka and Chong, 2016, 90) Researchers have focused on social media adoption in the business-to-business context (Siamagka et. al, 2015, 89, Lacka and Chong, 2016, 80), using social media in sales (Guesalga, 2016, 71), key account managers use of social media (Lacoste, 2016, 33) as well as proposing a strategic framework to evaluate social media use in companies (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017, 118). Fonecta (2017) demonstrates the opportunities and complexity of advertising in social media.

It is argued that social media sites can be used for several different activities (Lacka and Chong, 2016, 81) including targeting new business partners and managing existing customer relationships. Two-way communication in social media enables companies to adapt value propositions according to reactions on social media, and thus it can be considered as a marketing channel. Two-way communication is also argued to bring the company closer to the market enhancing customer relationships resulting in increased trust and loyalty (Lacka and Chong, 2016, 81; Siamagka, Christodoulous, Micaelidou and Valvi, 2015, 90). Furthermore, social media can be used to foster word-of-mouth marketing. According to Siamagka, Christodoulous, Micaelidou and Valvi (2015, 90) firms have three value-adding strategies at their disposal; these are information rich, relational exchange and joint learning strategy promoting collaboration inside the organization (Lacka and Chong, 2016, 81).

Social media is driven by an increase in customer understanding (Guesalga, 2016, 72) where customer and value proposition metrics to analyze success should be implemented. Social media strategies should be related to relationships, the product or service, the customer, and price integrating it to improving customer relationships. It is also argued that social media has the potential to make buyer-seller interactions more efficient fostering information symmetry. On the other hand, the negative effects on relationship quality due to lower face-to-face interaction should be considered (Guesalga, 2016, 72). This requires further

integration of sales and marketing to coordinate social media use at a strategic and tactical level. Two-way communication in social media for key account relationships has also been studied by Lacoste (2016, 35) whom identifies that key account managers will adopt social media because they are more engaged in relationship-oriented selling. Lacoste (2016, 35) highlights, that social media can be used as a tool to lower the cost of customer acquisition because it can be used to qualify leads in the early stages of the sales process which is a link with account-based marketing and the adapted marketing funnel (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016) because sharing relevant content through social media increases information exchange. Furthermore, customer-specific content in social media according to Lacoste (2016, 35) can be used to increase customer perceived value and nurture relationships with customers further demonstrating the role that social media has as a marketing channel in account-based marketing. One drawback of social media as identified by Lacoste (2016, 35) is that as the information obtained by the buyer/s increase the buyers power.

Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch (2017, 118-119) argue that linear relational exchange-based partnerships with consumers is no longer valid as the rise of social media has moved the balance of power in regards to control of a shared reality and the individual's ability to express brand narrative. A shift from relational to interactional orientation is required emphasizing multilayered interactions that cross venues and media where interactional orientation focuses on multifaceted relationships based on sharing within and between digital communities. In other words, with the rise of social media companies must consider all the channels both online and offline where a customer can interact with the company. Furthermore, Felix et. al (2017, 119) argue that marketing tools and strategies are quickly becoming obsolete forcing marketers to manage new challenges that are both organizational and philosophical including the inclusion of other departments and employees for the execution of marketing activities.

Felix, Rauschnabel, Hinsch (2017, 124) state that social media is complex to manage and execute by a single person or even a department by themselves and requires cross-functional collaboration along four dimensions to navigate social media marketing. These dimensions are social media scope, social media marketing culture, social media marketing structure, and social media marketing governance (Felix, et. al, 2017, 120). Social media scope considers whether social media is used to communicate with just a few stakeholders or used comprehensively internally and externally. The cultural dimension considers whether the

company is more traditional using it as a mass-advertising platform or modern by being open and flexible. The structure dimension addresses the level of centralization or departmentalization of social media. Finally, the governance dimension considers the level of formalization of social media use.

Account-based marketing should rely on sales to do research and target various different stakeholders (Marketo, 2017a), and by conducting research sales can ensure that relevant conversations are taking place. Social media sites from the perspective of account-based marketing is excellent for listening to what prospects are talking about and sharing in their network of contacts. This information can be incorporated for content personalization enhancing relationship building on a more personal level. As argued previously, social media fosters two-way communication, enhancing the overall customer experience, and maintaining existing relationships (Lacka and Chong, 2016, 81; Siamagka, Christodoules, Micaelidou and Valvi, 2015, 90). Furthermore LinkedIn, a social media website primarily for professionals has developed multiple different methods that can be used in paid advertising. These include sponsored content, sponsored InMail, display advertisements, dynamic advertisements, and text advertisements. (Fonecta, 2017) Sponsored content is content created by the company that can be targeted to specific audiences on LinkedIn. Display advertisements on LinkedIn can be used to direct individuals to view specific content. Dynamic ads are a form of display ads that add company personalized profile pictures to accompany the display ad. (Fonecta, 2017) Finally, text advertisements can be a combination of text and pictures that appear in different parts of LinkedIn in the right side of the banner. This illustrates the power of using a single social media website for example as an advertising platform in account-based marketing. Many of the advertising tools can be targeted at specific segments based on for example seniority, company, education and even interests where only the individuals based on criteria set-by the marketer see the specific advertisements on LinkedIn.

3.5 Customer strategy as a driver for account-based marketing

As an account-based marketing program requires an in-depth understanding of customers, it warrants a review of customer relationship management literature. Payne and Frow (2004, 526) believe that customer relationship management (CRM), not the IT-system, is a management approach that seeks to create, develop and enhance relationships with carefully

targeted customers to maximize customer value, corporate profitability, and thus shareholder value. CRM is often associated with the careful utilization of information technology to implement relationship marketing strategies. At its' core customer relationship management unites the potential of new technologies and new marketing thinking to deliver profitable long-term relationships. The basic underlying principle of account-based marketing is to consider each account as a market of one, and create marketing strategies for those specific accounts (SAMA and Storbacka, 2016) with the goal of increasing revenue, cross-selling, up-selling, or generating advocacy for the firm (Marketo, 2017a) relying on client insight (Simpson, 2017) and marketing software (Marketo, 2017a, 2015; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). The focus is to use cross-functional teams relying on various expertise to meet client specific business challenges (LinkedIn, 2016; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). This inception of account-based marketing shows new marketing thinking and combining new marketing technologies reflected in customer relationship management theory (Payne and Frow, 2004). In this sense, customer relationship management provides the opportunity to utilize data and information to co-create value through in-depth customer understanding that requires cross-functional integration of people, processes, operations and marketing capabilities where information, technology, and different applications act as its' enabler (Payne and Frow, 2005; Winer, 2001). Payne and Frow (2005, 171) show that customer relationship management is a five-step process that is divided into the strategy development process, value creation process, multichannel integration process, information management process and performance assessment process as shown below.

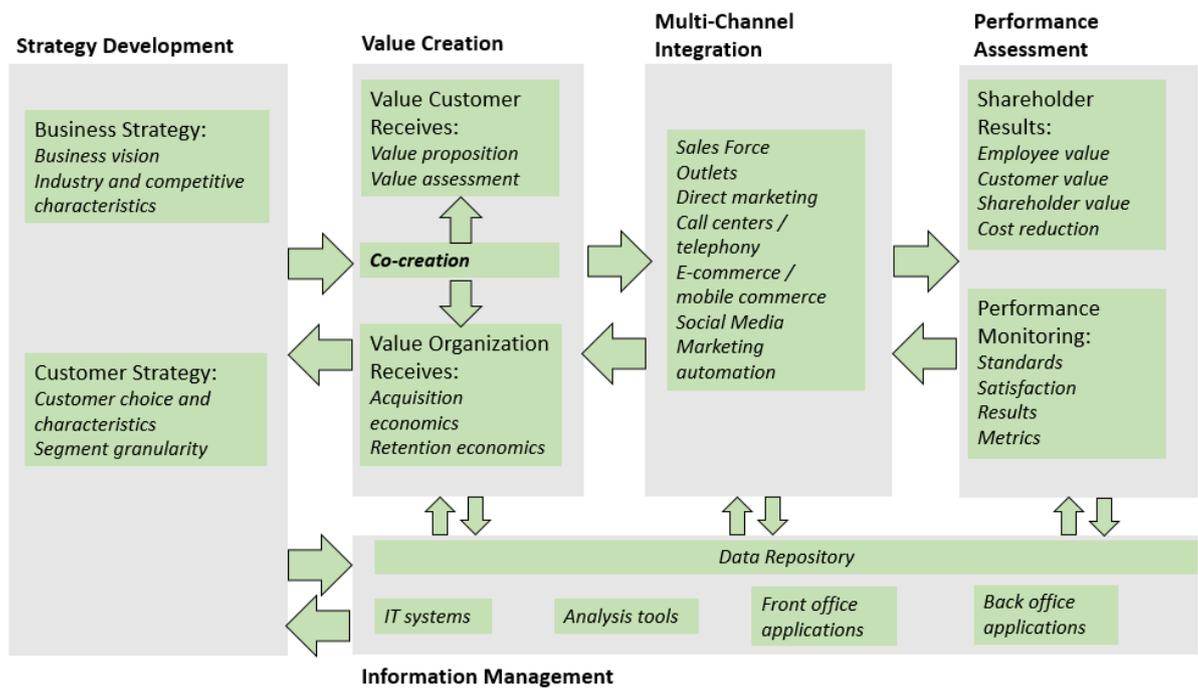


Figure 7: CRM framework (adapted from Payne & Frow, 2013, 211)

The following section discusses the strategy development process. The starting point according to Payne and Frow (2005, 170) is the review of the business strategy, and specifically how the corporate mission and vision is related to customer relationship management. Additionally, it can include customer centric analysis of competitive dynamics, industry trends, technology development and other analysis. This is followed by the customer strategy. (Payne and Frow, 2005, 170) This part of the analysis focuses on the evaluation of the existing and potential customer base and identifying the form of segmentation that is most appropriate. Central to the concept of strategy is the understanding that value is delivered to the customer which implies that a company must be able to identify who the customers are, the demands of the customers, and how the organization can satisfy the customer's demands in a sustainable way (Payne and Frow, 2014, 212). There are various strategic analysis tools available that fall outside the scope of this thesis, but in practice the outcome of reviewing the business strategy should be an identification of the key factors that make the business successful in the chosen markets (Payne and Frow, 2014, 228). By reviewing the business strategy, the outcome should be a clearly focused customer strategy.

A more critical factor in that relates the account-based marketing is the strategy development processes area that focuses on the customer strategy. This is the decision on which customer relationships the business wants to acquire, retain, or dissolve (Payne and Frow, 2014, 228).

The customer strategy concerns with the examination of the current and potential customer base and identifying the appropriate forms of segmentation (Payne and Frow, 2005, 170). In account-based marketing, segmenting customers is also a critical process (Marketo, 2017a). Developing a customer strategy requires data, and as a part of this process the level of segment granularity should be considered where segmentation of customers can occur on a macro, micro, or one-to-one level (Payne and Frow, 2014, 229). Winer (2001, 94) argues that customers can be analyzed from the customer lifetime value perspective to analyze current and future profitability providing direction to whether these customers are worth targeting with marketing. As the basis of customer relationship management is the building of relationship strategies creating competitive advantages often requiring redefining how customers are approached and segmented resulting in decisions about resource allocation (Payne and Frow, 2014, 229).

Payne and Frow (2014, 234) underline that in addition to conducting basic market segmentation companies need to decide the level of segmentation, also known as segment granularity. This idea is best presented as a figure as shown.

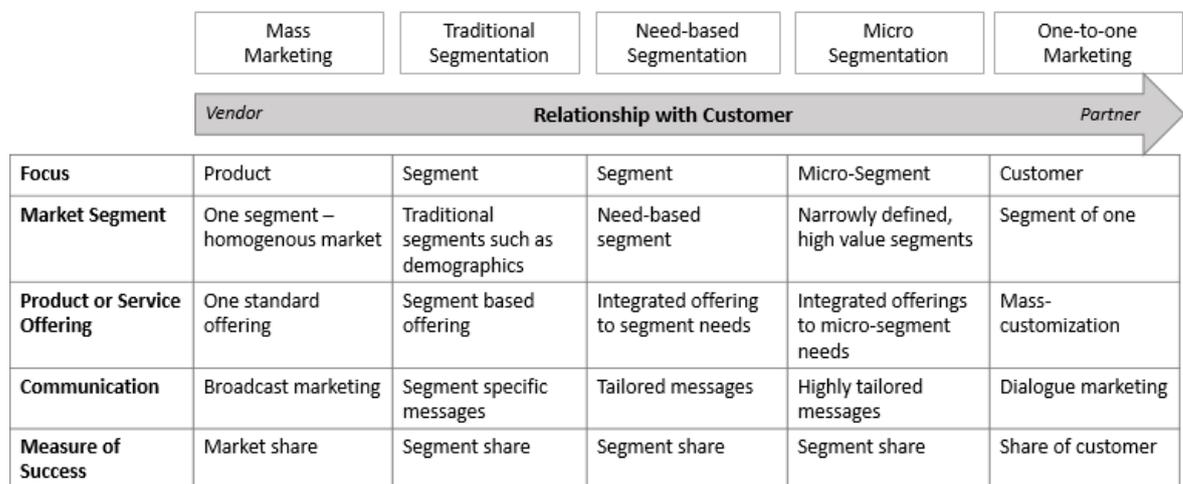


Figure 8: Segment granularity (adapted from Payne and Frow, 2014, 234)

As can be seen from the right side of the figure, one-to-one marketing is the treatment of customers as segments of one, which is similar to account-based marketing. Furthermore, the communication focus should be on dialogue marketing. With marketing automation, dialogue marketing is not as difficult to achieve due to less resource intensive measures for example by crafting unique personalized emails to each customer (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; SAMA and Storbacka, 2016; Payne and Frow, 2014). According to Payne and Frow

(2014, 235) markets are increasingly becoming more and more fragmented as a result of buyers looking for solutions to their specific problems and in this sense companies are being demanded to meet those specific requirement to solve those problems. Furthermore, Payne and Frow (2005, 170; 2014, 235) identify that the internet is enabling companies to adopt dialogue marketing instead of one-way communication. It is also argued that one-to-one does not mean taking the approach with every single customer, but the focus should be on adjusting the marketing approaches based on their economic importance and future potential.

Through developments of the internet, permission marketing has become relevant in the context of one-to-one marketing. (Payne and Frow, 2014, 235) Permission marketing can be explained by a customer opting-in to receive promotional messages where permission marketing focus is on marketing to those individuals that have signaled an interest and similarly account-based marketing uses permission marketing that is automated for developing long-term relationships with customers, build awareness and improve chances of making a sale using a specific software. An example of this a CRM software such as Microsoft Dynamics that can be used to collect customer information that have opted in to receiving marketing messages after a web-form submission which is coupled with a fully integrated software with Microsoft Dynamics such as ClickDimensions that can be used to automate marketing activities (Click Dimensions, 2017). The main reason as stated by Payne and Frow (2014, 236) for customers to join permission marketing programs is to receive information that is suited to their needs and interests.

Account-based marketing is closely related to customer relationship concepts argued by Payne and Frow (2014). As can be seen from Figure 8, as the relationship progresses from vendor to partner, the focus of activities becomes increasingly based on one-to-one principles. Account-based marketing treats these customers as markets of one with a focus on uncovering the real business problems and value drivers of the customer in order to enhance dialogue marketing in online activities (Payne and Frow, 2014). This can be as simple as personalizing web pages for their specific industry when promoting solutions to creating email campaigns that address these individuals with their first name and company. With marketing automation, dialogue marketing is less resource intensive and other software tracking tools are making these activities more and more scalable (SAMA and Storbacka, 2014). Account-based marketing also relies on a customer strategy (Payne and Frow, 2014) where the focus is on which customer relationships the organization views important enough

to develop which requires a clear understanding of the value that is provided to customers. In conclusion, account-based marketing shares similar concepts to that of customer relationship management.

4 Research design, methodology, and process

The next section outlines the research design and methodology used. First, using case studies in research is introduced. Second, data collection practices and principles are explained. Following this data analysis techniques are explained followed by an overview of the research process.

4.1 Case study research

The thesis will utilize case study design and methodology to investigate the account-based marketing concept. Myers (2009, 72) argues that case studies can either be used in early stages of research or when the researcher has a body of literature at their disposal for testing theory, developing casual explanations, and even comparing different theories. The focus of research in case studies is oriented towards a “what” question, and the “what” often is contemporary real life situations where there is limited control and everything might happen all at once (Myers, 2009, 73; Yin, 2003, 1). Furthermore, Yin (2003, 13) argues that case studies can be used when the boundary between the phenomenon and theory is blurred. Case studies (Yin, 2003, 13-14) cope with a situation that has more variables of interest, relies on multiple source of evidence using triangulation to converge data, and benefits from prior theories to guide data collection and analysis. Case studies can be focused on people where the unit of analysis is the individual but case studies can also be conducted for the study of an event or entity that is less defined than a single individual, including studies of processes, programs, or even organizational change. The single case study was chosen as a research methodology as single case studies are applicable when the case deals with something unique or extreme (Yin, 2003, 40). In the thesis, account-based marketing is a new concept in the company and as such a single case study is used.

Yin (2003, 35) argues that there are four methods for judging the quality of research design when conducting case studies. First, the case study researcher needs to establish correct operational measures for the concepts that are studied in order to minimize subjective judgements based on data collection. This is also known as construct validity and the researcher must address two specific issues. (Yin, 2003, 35-36) First, the specific changes that are studied need to be selected and related to the original objectives of the study. Second,

the researcher must demonstrate that selected measures reflect the change that is studied. Construct validity is increased when multiple sources of evidence are used and a chain of evidence is established.

The second issue of validity that a researcher must address is internal validity. First, the research must take into consideration other casual relationships that may exist between events (Yin, 2003, 36). By using analytic techniques of pattern matching, explanation building, addressing rival explanations, and using logic models internal validity can be increased. Second, a researcher must be aware of external validity which concerns with applying findings of the study outside the research context (Yin, 2003, 37). Finally, the researcher must also address the issue of reliability (Yin, 2003, 37-38) which considers the fact that if another researcher would undertake the same study, they would arrive that the same result.

4.2 Data collection

The primary data collection technique that will be used in this research project is that of participant observation, supplemented by documentary evidence and interviews. Yin (2003, 85) argues that data for case studies can be obtained from six different sources which include documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, and physical artifacts. Yin (2003, 85) puts forth three critical considerations for data collection when conducting case studies. First, a researcher should attempt to use multiple sources of evidence for triangulation, a case study database should be created for storing and retrieving data, and the researcher should attempt to maintain a chain of evidence. By utilizing various different sources of data, the case study researcher is able to triangulate for developing converging lines of inquiry making arguments convincing by relying on multiple sources of data to corroborate a fact or phenomenon addressing the problem of construct validity (Yin, 2003, 97-99). Second, as the researcher maintains a case study database of information the reliability of the case study increases (Yin, 2003, 101-103). Case study notes likely will compose a large part of the case study database where notes can be in multiple different forms. Relying on case study notes requires the researcher to focus on organization, categorization, and availability instead of rewriting notes. Finally as argued by Yin (2003, 105) by using multiple sources of evidence the researcher is able to cross-reference and maintain a chain of evidence further increasing validity of research.

4.2.1 Participant observation

A participant observer according to Yin (2003, 93-94) can take on a variety of roles when conducting research and can actively participate in the events being studied. This technique is used in specialized or everyday situations such as in the study of organizations. This is because the participant observer obtains access to unique events and individuals otherwise inaccessible to a researcher not using the technique. This allows the participant observer to perceive events from the “inside” as they unfold. However, the researcher must be aware of potential biases that may arise as the researcher may need to take on advocacy roles. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007, 284) argue that participant observation can be an extremely valuable principal research tool in combination with other methods. Participant observation is suitable for this thesis as the researcher is able to access events from inside the organization as they unfold and proceed forward, providing excellent grounds for data collection.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007, 287) emphasize that the role the participant observer takes can vary, and identify four key roles. These are complete participant, complete observer, observer as participant and participant as observer. The complete participant and the complete observer involve the researcher in concealing their identity and as the researcher in the context of this thesis is employed to conduct research on the topic where other individuals are aware of the researcher these two can be eliminated. The most fitting role in the context of this research is the role of participant as observer, as the researcher reveals the purpose of research and subjects are aware of this. This allows for detailed questioning and gaining of trust to access events that may happen behind the scenes (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2007, 288). The focus of participant observation is to immerse and reflect on experiences of the researcher, and this is an integral part of the thesis. By participating in events, the researcher gets submersed into the context of the events as they unfold and can reflect on these experiences. The list of events and interviews specifically for account-based marketing design can be in Table 1. It should be noted that in addition to these key events this was a continuous process where informal discussions were also held.

Table 1: Key events and interviews as a participant observer

Type of Event	Date	Key topics
Meeting	6.3.2017	Account-based marketing concept planning
Meeting	15.3.2017	Account-based marketing workshop planning and deciding on key interviews for the development process.
Meeting	24.3.2017	Account-based marketing background material review. This included a review of general digital strategies, understanding the organizations sales process, defining segmentation and overview of customer buying journey, marketing and sales information technology infrastructure. Key participants were sales development director and account-management process owner
Interview	29.3.2017	Interview with vice president of sales for a specific mining process Key topics that were discussed were familiarity with account-based marketing, background of the interviewee, applications of technology and customer overview, market development and analysis, value propositions of the technology, customer profile analysis, stakeholder overview, value delivered to the customer, sales process, and competitors.
Interview	29.3.2017	Interview with the business unit marketing manager. Key interview topics were business overview and account-based marketing applicability, marketing technology overview, marketing team objectives, social selling, content creation and management, and lead scoring.
Interview	4.4.2017	Interview with master data & analytics manager and development and deployment director. Key topic of discussion was customer relationship management software and its use in the organization.
Meetings	10.4.2017	A checkpoint meeting in regards to the workshop material.
Interview	10.4.2017	An interview with the product manager for the vertical target market. Key interview topics were, market analysis

		and development, customer segmentation and account identification, customer personas, marketing technology understanding, and value propositions.
Interview	12.4.2017	Interview with account director for a chosen key account for account-based marketing.
Interview	18.4.2017	Interview with executive vice president of business development and customers. Key topics that were discussed included corporate strategy, key account management, and the role of marketing.
Workshop	19.4.2017	A workshop that included the account director, the business line product and business development manager, marketing director, marketing manager, and application service manager. Also, two marketing consultants were present. The application service manager was included in the workshop because he had worked for the business line prior to the acquisition in various roles.
Meeting	27.4.2017	Meeting about the next steps for account-based marketing and workshop review.
Meeting	8.5.2017	Detailed overview of workshop results.

The themes that were discussed in interviews where the researcher acted as a participant observer can be found in Appendix 2.

4.2.2 Documentary evidence

Yin (2003, 85-88) highlights the importance of documentary evidence which can be used to support evidence from other sources and thus is useful method of data collection for case studies. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007, 246-248) list documentary evidence as secondary data and name this documentary secondary data. Documentary evidence is suitable as it enables the researcher to build a richer picture than only relying on observation or interviews. (Myers, 2009, 153-154) Furthermore, documentary techniques are used to categorize, interpret, investigate, and identify limitations imposed by physical sources of evidence. In this case study documentary evidence will be used to support participant

observation as it allows for a rich understanding of activities that may have occurred before the researcher was asked to conduct research into the topic. In addition, the researcher being employed by the case company during the conducting of the thesis enabled access to vast amounts of documentary evidence. The list of documentary evidence can be found below.

Table 2: List of primary documentary evidence used

Title	Date	Medium	Synthesis
2017 focus areas and strategy	2017	Internal news	An overview of key strategic development topics.
New business function established	2017	Internal news	Overview of the role of the new business function.
Way of working in the new corporate function	2017	Internal news	Detailed information communicated about how to work with the new business function and what this hierarchical change means.
Workshop pre-read material	2017	PowerPoint	Workshop material for account-based marketing planning.
Account-based marketing workshop material	2017	Printed PowerPoint presentation	Observations taken during the workshop
Account-based marketing workshop material version 2	2017	PowerPoint presentation	Output of the workshop day recorded by marketing agency
Account-based marketing project summary	2017	PowerPoint presentation	Summary of key results of the workshop day

Key account plan	2017	PowerPoint presentation	Key account plan for a single customer with detailed analysis.
Starch account-based marketing introduction	2017	PowerPoint presentation	Overview of the starch industry and why it was chosen as a pilot for account-based marketing.
Process framework: generate sales	2017	QPR	Overview of the corporate sales and buying process.
Web concept renewal	2017	PowerPoint presentation	Web concept renewal project information.
Strategic Customers and Business Development organization chart	2017	PowerPoint presentation	Organizational hierarchy of the new business function.
Web-based lead form problem	2017	Yammer (organization wide internal social media like application) post	Yammer post about an issue that was uncovered in web-based lead forms migrating to customer relationship management software.

4.2.3 Interviews

When the research has elements of exploratory research qualitative interviews may be used in order to infer causal relationship between different variables (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2007, 315). Interviews also allow for the researcher to probe meanings adding significance and depth to research. This thesis used semi-structured interviews during the beginning of data collection, but a downside of using semi-structured interviews is the issue of generalizability as the interviews represent small and unrepresentative number of cases that do not reflect the whole population (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2007, 319). These

interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken during the interview process. As a basis, these interviews were used to obtain an understanding of marketing role and practices in the case organization and to probe understanding of account-based marketing. Furthermore, an interview was held with an individual whom did not work at the case company but had experience in implementing and developing account-based marketing in order to further understand account-based marketing. Yin (2003, 89-92) argues that the interviewer has two objectives during the interview process. The interviewer should follow their own line of inquiry and ask questions in an unbiased manner. As the researchers aim is avoid offending interviewees the researcher should pose “how” questions instead of “why” questions, and in the context of this thesis all questions were formulated as how statements. For the researcher interviews should not be considered as verbal reports as they contain bias, poor recall and articulation. Below, a table of individuals whom were interviewed and their title maybe be found. The interview questions list can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 3: List of scope interviews and dates

Interviewee	Date	Title
Interviewee 1	9.3.2017	Chief Marketing Office (Outside the case company)
Interviewee 2	13.3.2017	Vice President Account Management / South East Asia and Asia Pacific
Interviewee 3	13.3.2017	Account Director
Interviewee 4	14.3.2017	Head of Services / Europe and North Africa

4.3 Data analysis

Myers (2009, 166) argues that qualitative data analysis should focus on transforming the data into something meaningful coming up with insights. This means asking questions such as:

- a) What is the meaning of my data?
- b) What are the main themes of my data?
- c) How does my data contribute to the field of knowledge?

Myers (2009, 170) argues that hermeneutics is a suitable method for analysis qualitative data where the researcher thinks about the text as a whole, interpreting its parts, and then thinking

of it as a whole again. Furthermore, hermeneutics is especially suitable for case studies as it focuses on the meanings of qualitative data because in these studies data can be gathered from multiple different sources including field notes, interviews, and secondary documentary evidence. (Myers, 2009, 181) Hermeneutics uses interpreting text-analogue, and text-analogue is not only text but also includes interpreting conversations, field notes and any other data trying to make sense of it (Myers, 2009, 183). In the case of this thesis, hermeneutics will be applied as an analytic strategy to create insights into all of the data collected from the varying different sources. Categorization can also be employed to group data into similar themes where data is then put under these categories that have been chosen (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2007, 480).

An analytic strategy as argued by Yin (2003, 114) is to develop case descriptive framework for organizing the case study. This is a applicable analytic strategy when a descriptive approach is used to create casual links to be analyzed. In the context of this thesis, a descriptive framework is created to describe the account-based marketing concept in the case company. This allows for data to be categorized and put in meaningful context. By taking this as the general analytic strategy, this can be coupled with pattern matching and explanation building. By matching empirical patterns with predicted patterns, the results can increase the internal validity of the case study. In this thesis, this means matching empirical patterns with literature that was reviewed in the prior section. Secondly, explanation building will be used in the case study. (Yin, 2003, 120) Explanation building is used to analyze case study data and build explanations. By building a descriptive framework, explanations can be used to further clarify the descriptive framework.

4.4 The research process

Research was carried out during a time span of three months while being employed by the case company between March and May of 2017. The account-based marketing development project had already been kicked off by the Marketing Director, Sales Development Director, and the Account-Management Process owner before the researcher started with the project. Other key individuals whom were deeply involved in the process were two outside marketing consultants whom enabled access to their knowledge and resources for the designing account-based marketing. Furthermore, a sales manager for a specific application of company technology, a key account manager, and marketing manager were also committed

to the project. There was keen interest in designing and implementing account-based marketing in the case organization which also resulted in allowing for research to be conducted inside the case organization. In practice, the research process can be divided into three stages.

1. Gaining and understanding to what is expected of account-based marketing and in general, the marketing team inside the case organization. Also, in this phase the researcher was introduced to the ways of working inside the marketing team, obtaining an understanding of whom the key actors in the project are, and what are the expectations of the project. Furthermore, in this phase interviews were organized between the outside marketing consultancy and predetermined interview targets that were identified to be important for designing account-based marketing. These individuals were decided due to them being involved in the later stages of implementing the account-based marketing program, their seniority, and their sales and marketing experience in the case company. In this phase, the two use cases for the later stages of implementing and testing account-based marketing was also decided. Please see Appendix 1 and 2 for the themes that were discussed in participant observation interviews and questions asked during scope interviews.
2. In the second phase a dedicated workshop for account-based marketing was held for interpreting results from the first phase. In this phase, key actors whom are directly impacted by the work were invited to attend because of their knowledge of the specific use cases where account-based marketing was deemed to be suitable. The input of these individuals was required in the workshop to assist in designing account-based marketing due to their knowledge of their specific industry or customers. Key participants in the workshop included the account director, the business line product and business development manager, marketing director, marketing manager, and application service manager. Additionally, two marketing consultants were responsible for organizing the workshop. In the workshop, key topics that were discussed included customer strategies, digital marketing strategies, tools, and tactics, customer segmentation for the vertical target market case, customer buying behavior and how it relates to digital marketing, sales and marketing processes, and content marketing.

3. In the third phase, the account-based marketing design was finalized and a conceptualization of the program was introduced for approval. Through a conceptual “hypothetical” suggestion for how the account-based marketing program could be implemented the account-based marketing program becomes concrete instead of staying as an abstract concept. This is done to ensure commitment to the later stages of implementing the program.

In the first phase, interviews were also conducted with key account managers inside the case organization and in this case semi-structured interviews were used to probe key account manager understanding of account-based marketing and its related processes. Also, an informal interview was held with an individual that was not related to the case company but was a Marketing Director in a large organization which had implemented account-based marketing. These interviews were conducted to first probe key account managers perceptions of account-based marketing and also reflect on the experiences of an individual whom had closely been involved in a similar project. Interviews with key account managers lasted about 30 minutes while the interview with the outside person lasted for an hour. Two of the interviews were conducted via Skype as a result of geographical distances, and two interview was conducted face-to-face. See Appendix 1 for interview questions.

The researcher was a participant observer in interviews conducted by the marketing consulting company where a Marketing Manager, the Executive Vice President of Customers & Business Development, a Key Account Manager, Vice President and Sales Director of a specific mining process, Product Manager, and a Master Data & Analytics Manager and Development and Deployment Director were interviewed. This provided the chance to observe answers to questions, document answers, and observe behaviors in interview sessions that lasted one hour. These interviews were conducted face-to-face with the exception of the key account manager whose interview due to geographic reasons was conducted over Skype. Also, the researcher was a participant observer in a total of 12 meetings that lasted one hour and a full day workshop that lasted from 9:00-15:00 all related to account-based marketing where the researcher was an participant observer. See Appendix 2 for themes discussed in participant observation interviews.

5 Empirical results and findings

The following sections presents results and findings from the empirical part of the study. Following case description as an analytic strategy as presented by Yin (2003), understanding the case is divided into a section with a focus on account-based marketing. These are then linked to various theories as covered in the theoretical review. This is followed by a discussion of future research topics and managerial implications.

5.1 Introduction to the case company

The case company is a supplier of a vast portfolio of technologies to customers in the metals and mining industry. Based on a meeting between sales, marketing and the consultant company, the case company's customer structure is very close to the 80-20 Pareto rule. In this sense, 80% of profits is made up by 20% of the customers. It was further commented that it could almost be 90%-10%. Furthermore, internal news stated that there is a new way of working that was related to the organizational structural changes in the case company. (Way of working in the new corporate function, 2017) This change resulted in establishing a new services strategic business unit, and a new strategic customers and business development corporate function. The marketing department was moved to align with this new function from another corporate function. It should be noted, that this function includes global key accounts, account management development team, sales development team, value-based sales support, and customer intelligence. This shows the commitment to a more customer centric mindset where the new corporate function had already been first communicated in the beginning of the 2017. In addition, in an introductory discussion with the marketing director of the case company it was highlighted that the sales cycles in the case company are long and complex. The figure below shows the composition of the marketing team (Strategic Customers and Business Development organization chart, 2017).

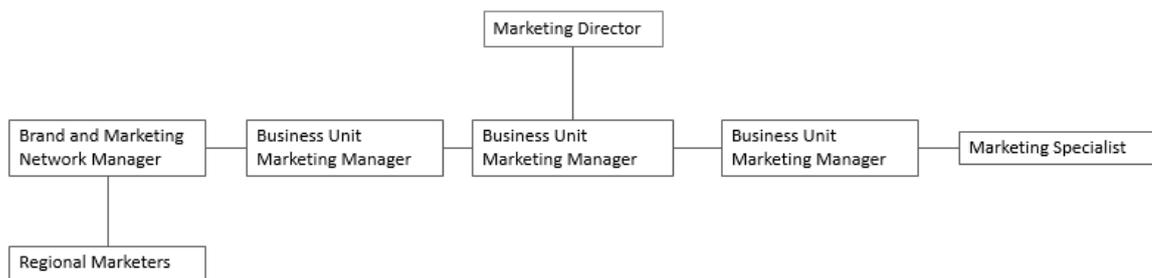


Figure 9: The marketing team and hierarchy

As we can see, the marketing team is very small consisting of 3 business unit marketing managers, a marketing specialist and a brand and marketing network manager whom is in charge of regional marketers. This whole team is then led by the marketing director whom reports to the executive vice president of the new Strategic Customers and Business Development function.

5.2 Current situation in the case company

In order to provide some insight into why account-based marketing is a development topic in the case company, a brief review of the current situation of the case company is required. Based on internal news (2017 focus areas and strategy), the 2016 year was extremely difficult for the case company. This has resulted in the development of five key topics for 2017, where one of the development areas is customer focus. Customer focus is an interesting one for this thesis, because account-based marketing is the investment of marketing resources into specific accounts, treating these accounts as markets of one in order to facilitate sales and buying behavior for reaching specific objectives highlighting customer focused marketing activities (Marketo, 2017a, LinkedIn, 2016; Storbacka and SAMA, 2016). Customer focus in the case organization has specific objectives, including increased order intake, sales and profit growth, improved customer satisfaction and increased share of wallet which reflects the business strategy review process in the CRM framework as presented by Payne and Frow (2005).

In the past, there has been development along multiple fronts in marketing. First of all, new customer relationship management software was launched with intentions to deploy it further down the organization meaning more individuals should obtain access to it. This was coupled with choosing a suitable marketing automation platform that integrated well with the chosen CRM software vendor (Master Data & Analytics Manager; Development and

Deployment Director interview, 4.4.2017). This shows the ideas presented by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) whom in the modified Figure 6 show that marketing automation and CRM need to have integration throughout the sales funnel. Additionally, there has been work with marketing focus in order to obtain a common way of working, but a shift to customer specific activities is needed. For example, an account director in the first phase noted that for a strategic account there were no marketing activities taking place. This means that any possible messages that can be pushed into the account is a positive development. However, the interviewee stressed that all communication whether it is digital or non-digital should have the same core message. In this sense, the core message could be that the case company is an expert in a specific area of mining such as copper mining but this core message is then personalized to meet the individual requirements of the buyers. For example, by modifying this core message in a way that for CFO's the message could be "increasing ROI in copper operations" linking the core copper message to better resonate with the financial decision makers whom maybe in charge of investment calculations. This translates to a key objective of 2017, which would be to investigate the applicability of digital tools and technologies to drive sales and marketing effectiveness.

Interestingly, account-based marketing is a potential tool to drive sales and marketing effectiveness. By carefully considering which opportunities to pursue a strategic investment of marketing resources will be deployed to support sales thus increasing effectiveness (Marketo, 2017a; LinkedIn, 2016; Homburg, Jensen and Krohmer, 2008). The same internal news article stated that the organization should focus on carefully selecting appropriate projects where the company can actually deliver value (2017 focus areas and strategy; 2017). Quoting the article, "we need to be brave in selecting the specific projects where we can really create value for our customers, and not run after all the potential opportunities." Along these lines, a large drawback that showed up in interviews and discussions with the marketing team in the first phase of the research process was that marketing inside the organization holds a very basic role and is often seen as a support function. By this, multiple individuals including the marketing director and a business unit marketing manager mentioned that marketing often conducts ad hoc activities at the request of specific departments, instead of being in an active role in determining business development activities. This means that marketing's role traditionally is mainly in top of the funnel activities. On the other hand, sales and account management processes have been developed, but are lacking a structured

marketing perspective that identifies cross- and up-sell activities and general support for marketing and sales alignment for common processes, roles and responsibilities between the departments. However, due to a change in the organizational structure, there was hope that this could change and marketing becomes more important. Furthermore, the idea that the organization may have a “I know what I am doing” mentality in sales exacerbating the issue of cross-collaboration, but the idea that by proving the effectiveness of the ABM approach this would increase the demands placed on marketing due to tangible results was mentioned (Interview with Vice President of sales for a specific mining process, 29.3.2017; Interview with Marketing Manager, 29.3.2017). This illustrates the necessity to prove the value of marketing inside the organization.

From a pure tactical view point, marketing is often publishing relevant news and articles on social media such as LinkedIn, publishing relevant snapshots of news on Twitter portraying the company, hosting specific themed webinars and customer seminars on a variety of different topics, uploading references to websites, and typically attending specific fairs and events. However, tools such as search engine optimization and marketing automation have loosely been tested where for example simple automation paths have been developed and deployed in order to test marketing automation. (Interview with Marketing Manager, 29.3.2017) However, a clear focus for how to use and develop these strategically is lacking especially for selected targeted accounts. With a small marketing team, the case company has the target of developing account-based marketing as a tool to employ and guide marketing automation practices in the company, supported by potentially buying media in order to really reach, engage, activate and nurture buyers providing feedback for sales in target accounts for specific opportunities increasing customer satisfaction and share of wallet in the future. Also, there has been development on-going for basic website personalization for different language. In the early stages of the development process, account-based marketing in the case company is viewed to be a method to test and implement marketing automation on the organization level. These large organizational changes and software development issues on the other hand do not come without challenges. There was an issue regarding webpage based lead inquiries had been uncovered that had resulted in a large number of leads not being transferred to sales in the CRM system (Web-based lead form problem, 2017). This shows the possible growing pains that may occur in developing and deploying new processes and software emphasizing one of the problems that may occur

when integration between marketing automation and CRM software is not working as planned showing the disconnect that may occur between stage 2 and stage 3 of the adapted marketing funnel in Figure 6. However, in conclusion the case company has developed and deployed the correct tools to leverage digital marketing practices to be used with account-based marketing.

5.3 Refining the account-based marketing concept for the case company

By reviewing documentary evidence from the workshop, reviewing experiences of the researcher from the workshop, and employing deductive reasoning, the following process framework that describes account-based marketing based on thematic analysis of all the material that was gathered during the research process is presented in Figure 10. Following argumentation by Yin (2003, 114), a descriptive framework was developed for organizing data that was gathered about what account-based marketing means for the case company, and what the process looks like. This assisted in categorizing and presenting data in a meaningful way. This was then coupled with pattern matching by reflecting how the data matched with the theories presented in the literature review and followed with building explanations for why the data is categorized in the manner as presented in Figure 10 which are subsequently discussed in the following sections. As can be seen, Figure 10 is a bit different compared to Figure 5, but follows similar logic as explained in the literature review section with the exception that join results review and, optimize and iterate the program is categorized under a larger theme of continued sales support. Along these lines, by applying hermeneutics (Myers, 2009) the research was able to grasp the meaning of the data and make sense of it as it relates to the developed descriptive framework.

As shown in Figure 10, business objectives typically considered corporate strategy, customer strategies, and the state of digital marketing. Customer understanding themes revolved around how well we know the customers and their business. Thought leadership was categorized with comments about content creation. Lead generation was often categorized by comments on how content is distributed such as social media, webinars, and landing pages. Lead nurturing was categorized by discussions about metrics and optimizing the program. Finally, sales support was categorized by discussions about how marketing and sales work together, and activities of both marketing and sales.

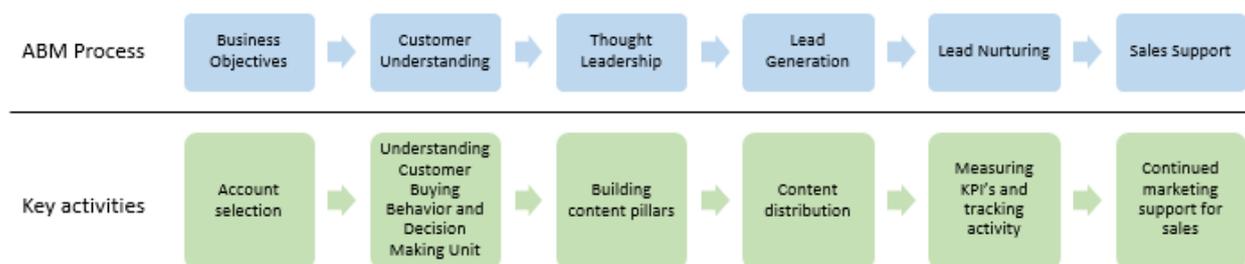


Figure 10: The account-based marketing process in the case company

5.4 Business objectives and account selection

Following the propositions by Payne and Frow (2005) a key section of the strategy review is an evaluation of the existing and potential customer base. Winer (2001) states that customers can be analyzed from the customer lifecycle perspective analyzing current and future profitability, and Payne and Frow (2005) argue that due to development of internet and related technologies a deeper level of segmentation is possible in the customer base. Furthermore, a company can conduct customer portfolio planning in order to assign scarce resources for improving operational strategies (Thakur and Workman, 2016, 4098). In the case company, two specific applications were selected for the account-based marketing program for testing. A large account relying on one-to-one marketing principles and a specific product vertical target segment that is not in the metals and mining industry but shares similar market buying decision criteria relying on one-to-few marketing principles as argued by Payne and Frow (2013). The first account case was chosen because there are opportunities inside the account that are attractive to the case company was chosen. This was stated in an interview with the account director (Interview with Account Director, 12.4.2017). The product vertical target market was chosen because this vertical market was viewed as a “low-hanging fruit” where any development in this market would be positive; this was stated by the marketing director during informal discussions that took place during the early part of research. In this case, one-to-one marketing means marketing activities conducted inside a key account towards influencers on a one-to-one basis, while one-to-few marketing activities mean marketing to specific strategic list of accounts (target companies) on a one-to-one basis. This is an important distinction because one-to-one marketing is considered one-to-one on an account (company) level marketing to that account as a market of one, while one to few is marketing to the selected few accounts as a market of one. This

also follows similar logic as argued by Payne and Frow (2014, 234) where a company can conduct one-to-one marketing or micro segmentation.

Discussions with the marketing manager and the sales manager shared similar views with that of the marketing director in corroborating the applicability of account-based marketing in a product vertical target market setting. First of all, this product was acquired to the case company through an acquisition shifting the focus more on the core business of the case company (metals and mining) which resulted in the ignoring of other potentially profitable market segments. The figure below illustrates the decline in order intake for a time period of 2005 – 2015 for the chemicals processing industry (Starch account-based marketing introduction, 2017). Based on this introductory presentation to the product application in the chemical processing industry the target is to grow this specific target segment business order intake in the future.

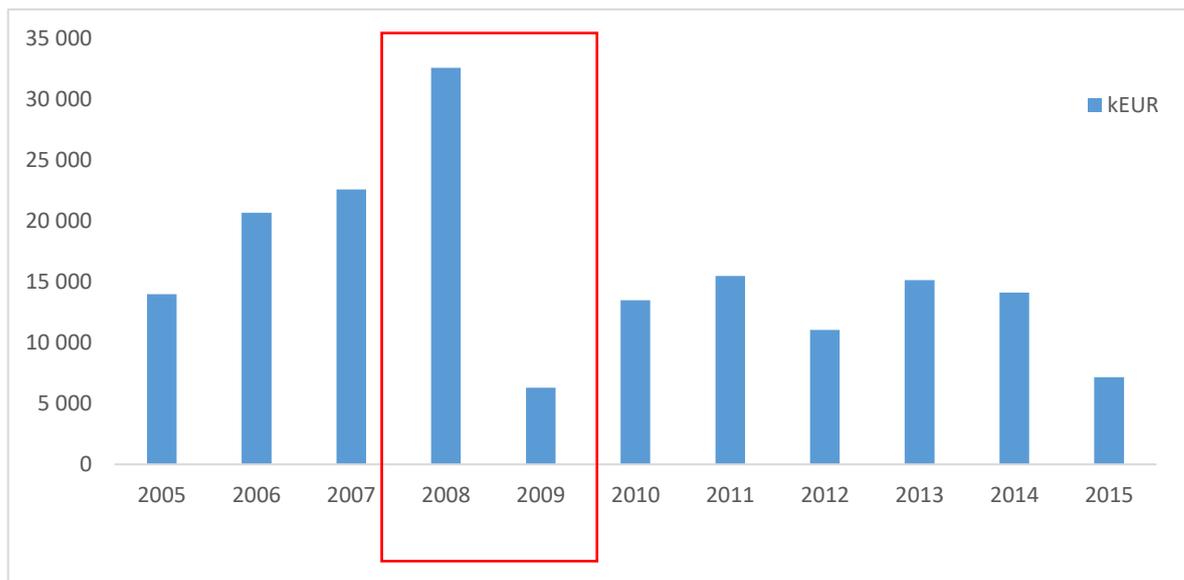


Figure 11: Chemical processing industry order intake

From the graph, we can clearly state that the business in the chemical processing industry has not recovered from the 2005 to 2008 growth in order intake, and has fluctuated between 10 and 15 million euros. Due to account-based marketing allowing for the investment of scarce resources more effectively it was selected as a suitable tool for targeting this vertical market segment.

Furthermore, a key account inside the organization was also selected as an application for account-based marketing. The main reasons behind choosing this account to take part in the

account-based marketing program was due to the multiple opportunities in the target account. The target account is located in the Middle East that as a government has taken the initiative to reduce the dependence on oil and exploit mining opportunities increasing both the mining industry's contribution to GDP and the number of jobs in the sector. Furthermore, the account operates several businesses including phosphates, aluminum and precious metals. However, it was identified that the account has multiple buying centers where stakeholders are complex inside the account through discussion with the key account manager. Furthermore, there is no active marketing that is done towards the account and in this sense any messages that reach key stakeholders inside the account is positive. The account has an ambitions strategy that is focused on growth and profitability and wants to maintain an ethical and socially responsible profile ensuring environmentally friendly operations. (Interview with Account Director, 12.4.2017; Workshop, 19.4.2017) These were key factors discussed by the account director during the participant observation process for why account-based marketing would be suitable. In conclusion, we can state that this account is characterized by complex organizational buying behavior that includes multiple stakeholders in addition to having multiple different buying centers inside the account with opportunities for growing the account making it suitable for an account-based marketing program.

5.5 Customer understanding

Account-based marketing heavily relies on understanding the customer's business model and customer buying behavior. Based on arguments presented by Töytäri and Rajala (2015) and Terho, Haas, Eggert and Ulaga (2012) mapping customer business goals, objectives, and earning logic is the first phase of developing value-based selling capabilities. This is because understanding the customer's business is a key requirement for value proposition development. This then directly feeds into developing appropriate content that resonates with buyers. Moreover, Skålen and Gummerus (2015) argue that value proposition based interactions with customers help the company to explain the value proposition to the customer in order to align buyer-supplier processes. Traditionally, organization buying behavior has been illustrated as a linear model (Webster and Wind, 1996; Johnston and Lewin 1996); however Makkonen Olkkonen and Halinen (2012) argue that the buying process may have multiple steps that do not progress linearly but some back and forth in decision making is to be expected.

In addition, research shows that understanding the buying center and roles that individuals may have inside the buying center is important (Johnston and Lewin, 1996; Webster and Wind, 1996; Johnston and Bonoma, 1981). Interactions that occur inside the buying center can be difficult to map, and a supplier should be able to identify key people and possibly the roles that they have. In addition, there are a multitude of characteristics that place influence onto the buying center that should be considered such as environmental and the amount of risk that is perceived to exist with the purchase of the solution.

From the workshop day, there is an identification that customers are increasingly active in the early phases when customers are looking for solutions to their problems based on frequent discussion with the marketing consultants and documentary evidence (Account-based marketing workshop material version 2, 2017; Workshop pre-read material, 2017). On the other hand, business-to-business companies typically have well planned sales processes but due to the increasing amount of information customers tend to have their own buying journeys even at an individual level. Furthermore, customers do not stop searching for information during the later stages of the sales process, but find, search and evaluate information on a constant basis. As one interviewee commented:

“Mining has been a very traditional industry, but the industry is starting to transform and catch up with a lot of other industries in the way that they are starting to do things in different ways.” – Head of Services and Key Account Manager

In regards to marketing practices, the same interviewee commented that:

“Marketing can in a traditional sense be seen as information. This means that we send you (the customer) a brochure with information. However, with account-based marketing, you progress from the traditional approach to knowing what their needs are and designing marketing programs based on those needs. This means really focusing and giving directed messages specifically for those needs.” – Head of Services and Key Account Manager.

This highlights the importance of being aware and proactive in mapping customer business problems for correct development of targeted messages towards specific accounts. Documentary evidence of a process diagram (Process framework: sales process) shows that customer buying behavior in the case company is thought of as a linear process, similarly to those presented by Webster and Wind (1996) as well as Johnston and Lewin (1996) as

illustrated.



Figure 12: Basic customer buying behavior process

As can be seen customer buying behavior has been identified as a generalized five step process in the case company and generally follows the proposed model as presented by Webster and Wind (1996) and Johnston and Lewin (1996). (Process framework: sales process, 2017) First, the customer is purely focused on managing the current business and how sites are being run. Second, when a problem, requirement, or investment decision arises or requires attention the need is verified for investment. This is followed by a solution proposal evaluation which results in the commitment to a project or service for development. Finally, when the solution or service is delivered the customers secures the value that is delivered for the investment. However, during the workshop (19.42017) it was commented that detailed customer journey mapping has not taken place especially in the digital space. This is because digital channels have been tested on a small scale but a more structured approach is required that gathers data and insights and measures for specific key performance indicators especially in how marketing activities can be used to help sales in achieving their objectives. This is then reflected on the current sales process (Process framework: sales process, 2017), as shown below.

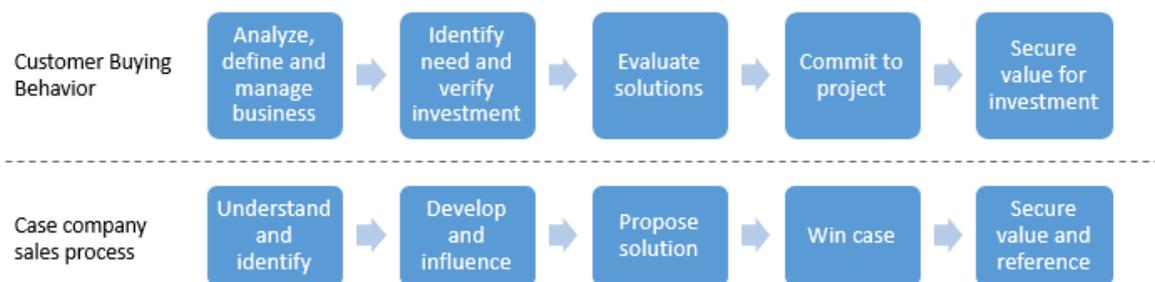


Figure 13: Customer buying behavior and the organizational sales process

In the first, phase, the goal would be to understand the customer’s strategy and operations and how they reflect to the customer objectives. Here key activities include customer relationship management and understanding financial drivers. In the second phase a need for a solution has been identified and the objectives are to understand the specific needs for that

project. Here key buying center decision makers need to be identified and the attempt to influence technology selection occurs. In the third phase, a proposed solution is sent to the customer with updated business cases to increase value offering. In phase four the focus is on winning the case and closing the deal by committing key decision makers into the project. It was stated in an interview with the Executive Vice President (18.4.2017) that the company can spend a large sum of money on a case that takes a long time to develop and ultimately lose the deal, illustrating the complex nature of business-to-business sales as argued by Söhnchen and Albers (2010). Finally, the project depending on the success is secured as a reference and an identification of new opportunities leveraging value takes place. (Töytäri and Rajala, 2015). As can be seen, the case company has taken strides to develop customer buying behavior understanding and use that knowledge to align sales efforts. However, marketing efforts have not been developed in conjunction and with account-based marketing, the hope would be to develop detailed marketing processes that support sales in order to outline which activities could be automated in order to free up marketing resources for later sales phase analytical support.

In terms of mapping key decision makers, the case company had completed a web renewal project that included key website user mapping, with key user personas developed as shown in the table below (Web concept renewal, 2017). These key user personas were used as a framework for guiding value proposition development.

Table 4: Decision maker personas

Job Title	Role	Interest	Needs
Senior Management	Decision Maker	Business implications	Success stories and financial implications
Development Manager	Decision Maker / Influencer	Process improvements in own development area.	Specific offering area information, success stories, and reference cases
Department Manager	Influencer / Decision Maker	Process improvements in own department / sub process.	Specific offering area information, success stories, reference cases, technical

			information (products/ solutions)
Operator	Influence / End user	Spare parts and/or services for machinery or specific technology.	Product descriptions and technical details.
EPC ¹ Engineer	Influencer / Decision maker	Need to get detailed information for solving own assignment.	Interested in technical details and specifications.

Furthermore, each one of these personas were further developed to signify their frustrations and goals towards the new web site while the buying behavior of a key account can be very complex as described in an interview:

“The key account has very complex stakeholders inside the account, and in practice there are multiple different buying centers that need to be addressed by marketing highlighted as turquoise boxes in the account plan.” – Key Account Manager.

This quote signifies the importance of understanding each unique buying center composition that may have an influence in customer buying behavior. However, based on the key account plan (2017), basic mapping of customer’s organization hierarchy has been completed assisting in the development of targeted marketing activities as some legwork has been done. This key account manager stressed that he personally has a list of 20-30 contacts from inside the account that can be identified and placed under active marketing (Interview with Key Account Director, 12.7.2017). On the contrary, when investigating the applicability of account-based marketing for a vertical market segment, the analysis does not need to be as detailed. Furthermore, it was identified that this market segment consists of both larger and smaller companies where the decision-making unit can vary from local to centralized

¹ EPC – this is an abbreviation for engineering procurement and construction. Based on discussion, these typically are third party companies that on behalf of the customer manage complex engineering and construction jobs but often do not take on the risk for project delivery.

structure (Workshop, 19.4.2017). This places further emphasis on conducting analysis and mapping of customer buying behavior as targeted marketing to the wrong individuals can be viewed as a waste of resources as there is no influence. Based on observation during the account mapping and screening process, it seemed like the product line manager seemed to be over worked without a clear plan for which geographic markets to focus on. In this context, this means that when designing an account-based marketing program key sales representatives should be pushed to conduct preliminary analysis and screening as the design phase will then be on hold without key target markets and accounts for where to invest scarce marketing resources.

5.6 Thought leadership

At the center of creating an effective account-based marketing program is the creation of a content strategy that is built around customers business problems. The idea of being a thought leader for social selling utilization were discussed with case company representatives.

“Inside the company we have technical experts that could be raised to the status of being a thought leader but this requires that they have a follow presence. Also, we actively try to support these individuals with our corporate profile by sharing and expanding their reach.”

– Marketing Manager

“Being a thought leader in our business could be a basis for differentiation based on our strategy, however reaching this thought leader status is also our biggest challenge.”

Executive Vice President

These comments highlight that thought leadership in a technology intense business is viewed as a beneficial method of differentiation but it has its own challenges in terms of selecting the appropriate corporate representatives who could be thought leaders. Another aspect that is related to thought leadership is the generation of relevant content based on a content strategy. As argued by Holliman and Rowley (2014) adopting content marketing has specific performance outcomes that relate to lead generation, brand awareness and building, achieving trust, and achieving thought leadership. This coupled with the result presented by Alejandro et. al (2011, 23) that in complex purchasing processes when the importance of the purchase increases cross departmental/functional decision making unit members that compose the purchase decision making unit rarely seek out information outside of their

specific role. In other words, a marketer will search for information about marketing implications of adopting a new enterprise resource planning software for example. Furthermore, Johnston and Lewin (1996) argued that in complex purchase situations information search increases and a variety of different sources will be consulted during the early stages of the purchase process. This signifies the importance of achieving thought leadership with content that is subject to specific needs of key decision makers of the decision making unit. This then requires adopting a publishers mindset (Holliman and Rowley, 2014) and focusing on marketing messages and content that caters to the specific needs of the target audience adapting content to match those requirements.

Based on workshop material (Account-based marketing workshop material version 2, 2017), behind this process of content creation and thought leadership development is the idea of value propositions to guide the creation of content following a 1:5:20 idea which will be outlined later. Borrowing the golden standard of value propositions developed by Anderson, Narus and von Rossum (2006) value propositions should be developed with a focus on how it resonates with the buyer focusing on the most important points of difference that generate the most value for the customer. In the case company when planning account-based marketing developing value propositions were based on the “why do they care?” phrase which had to be answered for five target strategic business units independently (Account-based marketing project summary, 2017; Account-based marketing workshop material version 2; 2017).

For senior managers and board of directors of the key account, this phrase was answered with:

- They are interested in financial impact and strategic growth.
- They want to see proven technologies.
- They are interested in the capital expenditure of the investment.

For the account’s phosphate business unit management, this phrase was answered with:

- These individuals are interested in operating expenditure and capital expenditure.
- Technologies that are proven to work.
- The safety and reliability of different technologies.
- There is an interest for knowledge transfer to their business as well.

On the other hand, EPC companies were thought to value:

- The cost of the solution.
- Process guarantees as the EPC companies want to minimize risk and do not take responsibility for the whole process.
- Proven technologies
- Interested in knowledge transfer in the sense that they want access to technology expertise of the potential supplier of the technology.

Considering that Sheehan and Bruni-Bossio (2015) highlight that value propositions are communication of bundled benefits to target customer problems we can link this to value proposition oriented content creation. For example, for EPC engineering companies that are involved in a large industrial project content can be created for proving the case company’s technology expertise by providing detailed solution oriented information aimed at outlining the process guarantee. On the other hand, this same content can be modified to target the upper management by highlighting the outcomes of deploying the case company solution for a specific problem in terms of monetary value using proven tested technologies.

As a tool to create thought leadership, the 1:5:20 concept was introduced during the workshop (Account-based marketing workshop material, 2017) which can be categorized under the thought leadership theme. In practice, this is a content management and generation concept that outlines a process for efficiently creating content as illustrated below.

Table 5: The 1:5:20 concept

1 Content Pillar	5 Derivatives	Distributed up to 20 times
A content pillar is a strategic marketing investment that requires expert opinion and research. The goal of a content pillar is to demonstrate thought leadership and sharing of in-depth knowledge	Derivatives are pieces of content that link back to the main content pillar, often taking a different perspective or summarizing and aspect of it. Goal of a derivative is to generate traffic to the content pillar.	These are the methods that are used to distribute the derivatives in various channels. These do not have to happen in an instant, but these derivatives can be scheduled and timed over a year for example.

From this idea, key content strategies were finalized and suggested for review based on a simple process as shown below.

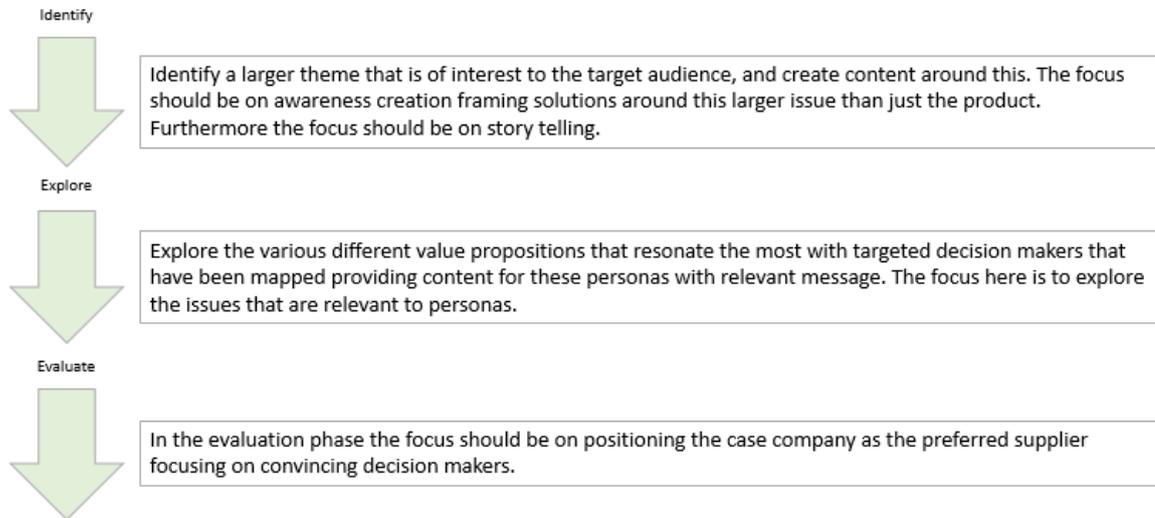


Figure 14: Process for finalizing content strategy (Account-based marketing workshop material, 2017)

As can be seen from the figure above, the general process aligns with the 1:5:20 concept presented previously. Identifying the key themes that interest decision makers allows for the creation of a content pillar. Exploring the issues allows for the creation of content derivatives. Finally, positioning the company allows for targeted messages that position the company and attempt to influence decision makers.

5.7 Lead generation and nurturing

In order to generate sales, account-based marketing needs to generate leads and nurture these leads with timely relevant content. However, the focus of account-based marketing is to generate leads inside a specific account, increasing information about the account to be used by the case company. Furthermore, because these leads are directly obtained from a program designed for the account, sales is wasting less resources on qualifying inappropriate leads. These are illustrated by the following comments.

“By understanding that the customer has a problem in their current process you would tailor a marketing campaign to really address those kinds of people in the environments in which they hang out socially. Whether that is Facebook, LinkedIn, at an event or seminar but you would really focus and give a directed message specifically for their needs.” – Head of Services and Key Account Manager

“The buying process has really changed in the past years. Now days, sales people get meetings with customers when they are just about to make a purchase decision. This shows the importance of ABM during the early stages of the sales cycle.” – Marketing Director

As decision makers are increasingly active during the early stages of the purchase process, marketers need tools to deliver content related to company value offerings motivating potential buyers to identify themselves (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Content delivery channels as presented in Figure 6 include search engines, e-mail, LinkedIn, YouTube as examples. Furthermore, various different social media sites have been studied and proven to enhance targeting of new business partners, managing customer relationships, fostering word-of-mouth marketing, and increasing information symmetry (Lacka and Chong, 2016; Siamagcka et. al, 2015; Guesalga, 2016). In this context, content can be delivered to decision makers through various channels primarily aimed at promoting content on those channels blocking the full content piece for lead information collection through web forms for example (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

The REAN framework was introduced by the marketing consultants based on work completed for other business-to-business companies during the workshop as a potential method for activating marketing in the early stages of the sales funnel supporting the sales process, combining lead generation and nurturing in the refined account-based marketing process (Workshop, 2017). Based on previous discussions and the literature review the REAN framework is categorized as a lead generation and nurturing tool situated at the top of the sales and marketing funnel as presented by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016). This is because the focus is to promote content in various different channels, driving traffic to a landing page for example, that then has downloadable content that is gated behind an information submissions form. After submitting information, it is possible for the case company to track the leads online behavior. REAN is an abbreviation for Reach, Engage, Activate, and Nurture (Account-based marketing workshop material, 2017).

In the reach stage, the correct decision makers are reached through targeted online promotions with correct messaging usually occurring in social media websites such as LinkedIn. Engage means the measuring of the quality of engagement which is defined as understanding whether the correct people are viewing and downloading the correct information. Activate stands for understanding whether a set of predetermined actions have been taken by website visitors, such as submitting lead information or signing up for a

corporate newsletter for example. Nurture is the way of actively encouraging activated visitors to come back and view more of the company’s content. Thematic analysis suggests that this is a framework for generating more and better quality leads, because information is targeted to the correct people in exchange for lead information. This means that marketing activities can uncover and identify new leads inside existing accounts through account-based marketing activities as there may be hidden influencers whom have not been identified by sales, but still are somehow involved in the purchase process. Furthermore, older leads can also be updated and verified if data on these leads are out of date. By nurturing, the case company can obtain increased information about the type of buyers that are consuming the content indicating their readiness for a sales action such as a telephone call for a sales scoping conversation. A tool that is increasingly relevant in marketing is called retargeting where customers are exposed to impressions (ads) of previously viewed products (Kannan and Li, 2017, 35). This framework can be used as the basis for modeling customer buying behavior and appropriate tools to be used in the account-based marketing approach considering the tools available to marketers as presented by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016). This same framework is used in both the vertical target market and key account approaches to account-based marketing.

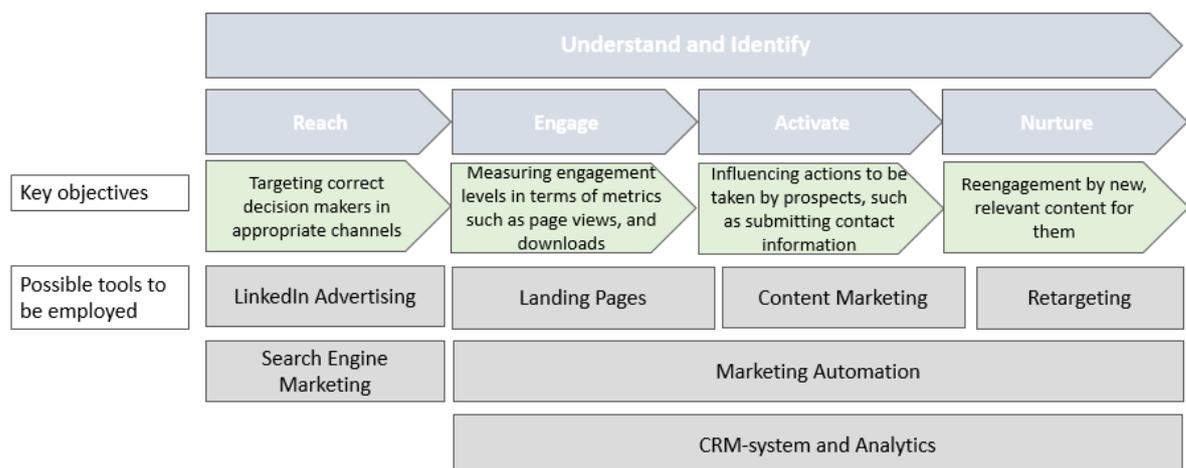


Figure 15: REAN framework combined with account-based marketing tools (Workshop, 2017; Account-based marketing workshop material version 2, 2017)

During this process, appropriate metrics should also be tracked according to company specific objectives focusing on how prospects were converted to sales in the long run (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). These include advertising impressions and email statistics in the beginning of the funnel, website visit quality and engagement in the middle of the

funnel, and leads generated and account reach in the middle of the funnel. Towards the end of the funnel, leads handed off to sales could be a possible metric to track indicating efficiency during the marketing process. These are examples of possible metrics, and the case company decided that important metrics for them in the long-run are improved hit rate, increased share of wallet, and increased cross-sales, while in the short-term a metric to track would be increased stakeholder reach. In the medium term, the largest impact should be derived from marketing contribution to pipeline metrics, in other words the speed in which leads progress through the sales funnel.

In meetings with the sales development director, individuals who are in charge of the CRM system, and in the workshop the importance of how a lead is defined inside an organization is one of the critical definitions that needs to be addressed early on. (Meeting, 24.4.2017; Interview, 4.4.2017; Workshop, 2017) In this case, the importance originates from having a unified definition of what is a lead. Results show that a lead in the case company is defined as any entity that has future potential for sales which is always attached to a contact. Furthermore, the case company does not want to distinguish between lead (step 1 of Figure 6) marketing qualified lead (step 2 of Figure 6, and sales qualified lead (step 3 of Figure 6) (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016) but instead opted to combine step 1 and step 2 because when a “contact has shown a behavior of interest they become a lead and in this sense they already are marketing qualified,” quoting the marketing director at the case company (Workshop; 19.4.2017). Having a common definition of what a lead is between marketing and sales helps further clarify roles and objectives.

5.8 Sales support

The goal of account-based marketing is to align marketing and sales tasks to ensure mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities and ensure that each function understands their contribution to sales development. Marketing often describes their situation in the way that they are outside of the loop in sales and have no understanding what happens day-to-day in the sales side. This means that marketing does not work together with sales, however, by adopting account-based marketing practices the ideal situation would be that marketing takes on a more active role in the sales process and increases collaboration between sales and marketing.

“In the UK we were able to obtain leads through content marketing and marketing automation but these leads were handed over to sales with mediocre success. Occasionally there were leads in the system that had been idle for over three months which was a waste of resources. In the UK we had done an analysis of how leads were being closed and the result was that marketing was bringing in leads with no commercial value. However, with account-based marketing tactics we were able to secure a huge deal from a broadcasting company which was a must win case for us.” – Marketing Director

In order to bridge the gap between sales and marketing, a process framework is required for clear definition of roles and responsibilities as illustrated below similarly to concepts developed by Söhnchen and Albers (2010) and Cooper and Budd (2007). This framework was introduced by the marketing agency as a process framework for identifying marketing and sales tasks along customer buying behavior of the case company. By reflecting on experiences, documentary evidence and observation this process framework is categorized as sales support as it is a tool for mapping sales and marketing activities along the customer buying journey and industrial sales process in an account-based marketing program.

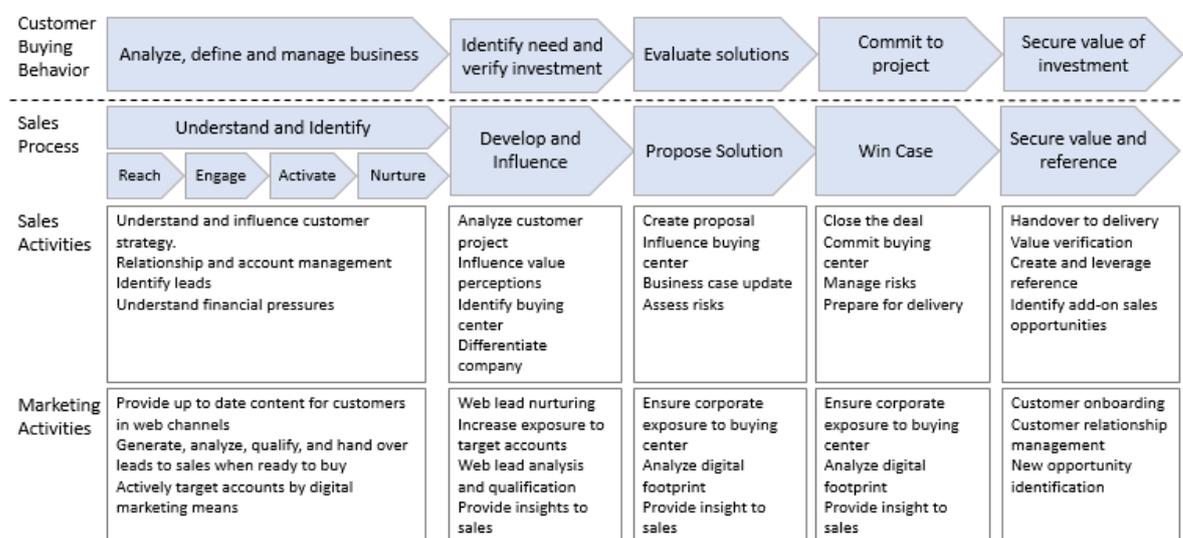


Figure 16: Aligning sales and marketing for sales support (Account-based marketing workshop material version 2)

During the early stages of the customer buying behavior there are several key activities. First, sales should attempt to understand and influence the strategy of the customer. This mirrors that of value-base selling during the planning stage. (Terho, Haas, Eggert, and Ulaga, 2012; Töytäri and Rajala, 2015) Also, sales should be proactive in managing customer

relationships to uncover opportunities and understand customer financial drivers identifying new leads in the customer organization. Marketing activities in this stage include provision of up to date content for customers in web channels. Also, marketing should be active in lead qualification and handover to sales and actively targeting accounts by digital marketing methods.

Next, when a customer has explicitly expressed an interest towards investing into a new project sales should be ready to analyze the feasibility of this project for the company. This requires influencing value perceptions of the customer in regards to the optimal solution. This seller's objective in this phase should be the influencing of customer's solution vision through leveraging seller strengths (Töytäri and Rajala, 2015; Terho, Haas, Eggert, and Ulaga, 2012). Additionally, the seller should try to identify key members of the buying center. Marketing in this stage should be focused on nurturing web based leads and adding sales identified leads into nurturing that are outside the scope of marketing. This results in increased company exposure inside the target account by leveraging the multitude of tools available to the marketers. In practice, nurturing occurs until the project has been won or lost and new marketing tactics are decided for customer relationship management. (Workshop, 19.4.2017) Any account insights that marketing has generated in this stage should be shared with sales to increase their understanding of what is occurring inside the account.

If the project is feasible, then a solution proposal is submitted to the potential customer. Here, sales should be focused on influencing the buying center that the solution is the best solution and assess the risks associated with the sale. (Workshop, 19.4.2017) Here, marketing plays a role in influencing the buying center through digital channels ensuring corporate exposure inside the buying center. Simultaneously marketing should analyze digital channels used increasing account insights to be shared with sales. Following this, the target shifts to winning the case by closing the deal. Here, marketing also offers ongoing support to sales.

Lastly, sales should focus on value verification and leverage (Töytäri and Rajala, 2015) and attempt to secure a reference customer for the company (Workshop, 19.4.2017). There should be an identification for add-on sales opportunities as well. Marketing role here focuses on customer relationship management and new opportunity identification through an ongoing analysis of customer activity in digital channels. By aligning both sales and marketing in this method for on-going sales support from marketing, both roles specifically

target activities in securing sales by converting quality lead into opportunities that result in revenues. This provides increased legitimacy for marketing. As was stated in an interview a key consideration is that skeptics will be located inside the organization which means that the value of ABM will need to be proved inside the organization (Vice President of Sales for a specific mining process , 29.3.2017). With marketing taking a more active role and supporting sales, marketing can show their impact on revenue generation through for example more advanced metrics.

In conclusion, the empirical part of the study outlines a possible method to align sales and marketing activities and organize digital marketing activities for targeted marketing for specific accounts which in practice is account-based marketing. This is a complex process that based on the researcher's experiences requires commitment from both marketing, sales, subject matter experts, and top management across the organization. Commitment has been studied in key account management implementation and it has been identified as one of the success factors (Tzempelikos and Gounaris, 2015; Marcos-Cuevas et. al, 2014). Similarly, to key account management, account-based marketing requires commitment from all of the parties involved to create the account-based marketing program as there are multiple moving parts that require the expertise of each specialist. Without commitment from subject matter experts, content is hard to produce, while without commitment from sales potential leads will be unqualified and not screened for future opportunities. The empirical part of this single-case study provides further direction for parties interested in implementing account-based marketing in their organization.

6 Conclusions and discussion

The following section highlight the primary conclusions that can be withdrawn from this case study. Furthermore, managerial implications, theoretical implications and avenues for further research are highlighted. The thesis studied the design of an account-based marketing program that reflected literature from sales management and processes, digital marketing, and customer relationship management.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

This thesis added new knowledge in designing an online marketing program targeted at specific accounts and specifically answered the research questions of designing an account-based marketing program. The literature review showed that research has been carried out in the various topics that were covered in this thesis, such as organizational buying behavior, sales management and value-based selling, and digital marketing, but no prior research to the knowledge of the researcher had been conducted on how do all of these areas fit in a larger digital marketing program, and how the activities for designing the program fit together. The key findings for the research questions are discussed below. The main research question was partly answered by the sub research questions, and thus these are answered first followed by answering the primary research question.

What is account-based marketing as a concept?

Account-based marketing is a concept that unites new marketing thinking and information technology for profitable long-term relationships (Payne and Frow, 2004) where marketing automation and content marketing are the core building blocks due the ability to target and automatize marketing activities. This is because account-based marketing provides the frame of thought for considering marketing automation and content marketing activities and how they should be planned for strategic accounts. This then requires collaboration and commitment between marketers, sales personal, and subject matter experts (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016) for implementing the program. Furthermore, it is a concept that helps marketers target purchasers whom are increasingly active during the purchase process, helping define strategic accounts and these accounts buying center for producing content, and designing automation activities that are completed throughout the customers buying

behavior in order to generate more influence in the account as a whole. Also, it defines the metrics that are tracked and specifically links these metrics to sales. By looking at marketing metrics that are linked to sales, account-based marketing provides unique insight to how marketing contributed to sales increasing marketing accountability.

To summarize, account-based marketing is a concept that considers future sales opportunities in an account/s and tailors a digital marketing program for these accounts heavily relying on marketing automation and content marketing in order to align sales and marketing for communicating value to specific predetermined customers. It maps out both sales processes and customer buying behavior and attempts to define sales and marketing tasks for facilitating sales. It requires information to be exchanged between these two departments and collaboration in order to meet specified targets.

What is the current view of the customer buying behavior, and how account-based marketing can be used to target buyers?

Also, the question of mapping customer buying behavior was answered. This can be seen in Figure 13, that maps both the sales and customer buying process. Account-based marketing can be used to target buyers by mapping activities for both sales and marketing, as can be seen in Figure 16. By mapping organization buying behavior, sales processes, and marketing processes an organization can define and manage the tasks that and lay accountability to both marketing and sales for meeting objectives on each of the phases of customer buying behavior. This then results in seamless collaboration between sales and marketing throughout the marketing funnel as presented by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016). Content is published in various channels promoting the content in marketing channels while lead nurturing is conducted through the use of marketing automation. Lead tracking is used to track web behavior of contacts inside accounts, and these are handed off to sales when a predetermined lead score is met. Next sales takes over and qualifies the lead and screens for future opportunities. This example illustrates how account-based marketing can be used to target buyers matching it with their buying behavior.

However, previous information on online customer buying behavior had not been conducted, and thus the design of the account-based marketing program provides guidance for how they could be organized. After implementing the program, the company can reiterate the program to become more agile in targeting specific accounts. In conclusion, by mapping

key activities, sales and marketing can align along customer buying behavior to better meet internally set objectives and target specific buyers. This also answers research question 3:

How can sales processes be aligned with buying processes by using account based marketing?

By internally reviewing sales and marketing activities, an organization can define the roles and responsibilities of each department which has also been studied by Homburg, Jensen, and Krohmer (2008) adding knowledge into marketing and sales alignment. This also requires joint information sharing in order to outline any changes and iterate the account-based marketing program. As account-based marketing defines the frame-of-thought for how to design the activities, it allows for the sales and marketing organization to better align with the customer buying process.

This thesis specifically addresses Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) demand for more study to be conducted in digital marketing tactics. Also, Kannan and Li (2016) demanded more research to be conducted on how can marketing activities be automated using data, and this thesis identifies a possible approach to be used when designing promotion activities in the digital space. On another note, this thesis also adds knowledge into how value can be communicated online, the role that understanding organizational buying behavior in the online space plays, and how new marketing technologies are changing the landscape for modern marketers.

Using an account-based marketing program helps in designing marketing activities and content by addressing the unique needs of specific target customers relying on sales person knowledge of the account. By creating content that addresses the pain points of the specific customer value can be communicated to the customer in the online space. Furthermore, throughout the thesis it has been discussed that buyers become increasingly active in information search activities in the early stages of the purchase process. This means that by publishing content online, the company can position themselves to be the go-to-resource for new insight and fresh ideas on how to improve their own processes. In this sense, account-based marketing supports the buyers purchase process online, assisting in positioning the company as a thought leader. Finally, by looking at how to organize marketing activities, it adds new knowledge into the role played by marketing automation and content marketing. As information is in the fingertips of buyers, it is increasingly imperative for marketers to

design a program that meets the buyers thirst for information when a problem to their processes arises. This thesis shows that a lot of the top-of-funnel activities can be organized online through content marketing and marketing automation assisting in lead generation and lead nurturing providing direction for how to organize these activities adding new knowledge. By collaborating with sales, both are aware of the objectives of the program increasing accountability of marketing actions. Finally, by answering these sub research questions, the primary research question can be answered.

How can account-based marketing be designed in the case company which operates in the business-to-business market characterized by close personal relationships and long sales cycles?

As can be seen from Figure 10, there are several key steps that are required for developing and account-based marketing program. We can illustrate this in six steps. Understanding business objectives and account selection, developing customer understanding, generating thought leadership, lead generation, lead nurturing, and sales support. Account-based marketing is closely related to content marketing (Holliman and Rowley, 2014; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016) with a focus on customer building, lead generation and brand building (Karjonen, Mustonen, Ulkuniemi, 2015). By taking a targeted approach to developing marketing activities marketing resources are invested in conducting activities that are relevant to the specific buyers and influencers whom play a role in the buying decision making unit (Webster and Wind, 1996). By realizing that buyers are also individuals with their own aspirations, demands, and pressures marketing can make the buying situation less complex (Johnston and Lewin, 1996) as buyers search for information that is relevant for their business. Furthermore, account-based marketing can be seen as a method for defining sales and marketing tasks increasing alignment between marketing and sales to meet the same objectives. Homburg, Jensen and Krohmer (2008) studied how marketing and sales are aligned while this thesis provides a framework for how to further align and define sales and marketing activities by clarifying roles and responsibilities inside an organization as they relate to digital marketing and sales process management. This adds new knowledge into designing digital marketing programs that are targeted at specific accounts, combining previous research conducted by the likes of Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) and Holliman and Rowley (2014) into a process framework.

As discussed before, one of the findings of the study are how digital marketing activities can be designed in order to create influence in the buying center. As purchasers activate themselves during the information search process, it is imperative that content addressing their needs is distributed throughout various channels. By offering content to buyers and positioning the company as a thought-leader, buyers will end-up consuming content published by the company as they are a proven expert. By incorporating lead tracking and lead information collection, new technologies enable companies to track the leads web behavior and assist in mapping hidden influencers and decision makers inside the buying center, generating more reach inside the account.

In conclusion, this thesis combines previous literature that has been conducted in organizational buying behavior, digital marketing, customer relationship management and sales processes and management and utilizes this knowledge for building a marketing program. In this sense it combines sales processes with customer buying behavior and identifies the role that marketing has in the facilitation of these for sales. Without understanding customer buying behavior, marketing tactics can be designed to be irrelevant for buyers, and without understanding the corporate sales process marketing tactics for sales support cannot be defined. In this sense, this thesis adds new knowledge into sales, marketing, and organizational buying alignment.

6.2 Managerial implications

Managerial implications of this thesis are twofold. First, this thesis provides a framework for designing an account-based marketing program. It provides direction and considers key issues to be tackled when choosing to develop and account-based marketing program from a managerial perspective. By providing detailed discussion of the required steps in developing account-based marketing, it provides insight into the challenges that managers may face as discussed next.

One of the themes which occurred throughout the conducting of this study was that the role of marketing is purely oriented towards supporting sales on an ad hoc need basis. On the other hand, by conducting account-based marketing there is an aim to increase marketing from a pure support function to being considered an important driver for business. By collaborating with sales, marketing can increase their status inside the case organization by showing the results of the account-based marketing program. As was commented, one of the

key challenges would be that there will be skeptics inside the organization and by proving the value of marketing activities the status of marketing can be increased inside the case organization.

Another managerial implication would be on how to align marketing and sales to work together and cooperate. Homburg, Jensen, and Krohmer (2008) developed a taxonomy for different sales and marketing configurations while this thesis focuses on the practices on how to increase sales and marketing alignment. By defining the roles and responsibilities inside the organization, managers can obtain an understanding of where marketing can assist sales, and where sales can assist marketing. Moreover, by defining targets from a sales perspective the contribution that marketing has in sales can also be showed.

Finally, the question of how to generate thought leadership was also considered, which is another managerial implication. By following the 1:5:20 concept, an organization can position themselves to be a thought leader by publishing and utilizing relevant content. In complex buying decisions with time pressure, information search is increasingly active in the buying center (Alejandro et. al, 2011) and being a thought leader in the industry can be considered a positive position and method for differentiation. By being a thought leader, the organization can be positioned as the “go to” expert when a customer is facing a problem with for example, one of their processes.

6.3 Limitations and agenda for further research

This section discusses limitations and an agenda for future research. The first limitation would be that this study was conducted as a single case study and should be treated as such. In different organizations, there may be different sales processes and a different understanding of customer buying behavior resulting in a different conceptualization of account-based marketing on a tactical level. However, the process framework can be generalized and used in different organizations. Furthermore, as this thesis only focused on the design of an account-based marketing program, implementation of the program was left out of the thesis. In this sense, implementing account-based marketing could be studied by focusing on organizational characteristics that play a role when implementing account-based marketing. This can be completed in a similar fashion to studies that have focused on for example key account management implementation. (Wengler, Ehret, Saab, 2005; Marcos-Cuevas, Nätti, Palo, Ryals, 2014) This also acts as one of the suggestions for future research.

Furthermore, a closer examination of the roles that marketers and sales managers have in the process could be examined by conducting a longitudinal study of an organization that has implemented key account management and wants to develop account-based marketing. By for example relying on participant observation a researcher could study the interactions that occur between key account managers and marketers throughout the whole process of planning and executing an account-based marketing program. This would uncover new issues in organizing sales and marketing activities and uncover insight into the different taxonomies developed by Homburg, Jensen, and Krohmer (2008). Even though these issues were not researched this thesis it provides a starting point for developing new research in the increasingly important topic of digital marketing that is becoming increasingly broad as a concept (Kannan and Li, 2017).

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Appendix

Appendix 1: account-based marketing scope interview guide

1. Could you elaborate on how do you see your role in between the customer and (case company)? What responsibilities do you have?
2. In general, what are your expectations of the marketing communications team?
3. How can the marketing communications team support you in account management, marketing processes?
4. What is your view of account-based marketing? How would you define it? How do you see it?
5. In account management, how do you see the customer buying journey?
6. Do you think account-based marketing can support the buyer in their decision process?
7. From a key account management perspective, what sort of marketing communication activities do you see being the most beneficial?
8. How do you view customer relationship management? How do you define it in key account management?
9. What sort of tools do you prefer to use in managing the relationship with the key account? Any examples?
10. Can account-based marketing assist managing customer relationships?
11. In terms of sales processes, how would you describe a typical sales process in (case company) context?
12. How important are targeted value propositions?
13. How do you view account-based marketing in supporting the sales process and clarifying (case company) value propositions?
14. How about obstacles? What do you see being the main obstacles?
15. For account-based marketing to be successful, what do you think is required?
16. Are there any other things we should keep in mind?

Appendix 2: General themes discussed in participant observation interviews:

- Company strategy and vision
- Customer perspective
 - Understanding customers
 - Marketing and sales channels
 - Customer communications and content
- Company perspective:
 - Processes for sales, marketing and account management
 - The use of data and tools
 - Organizational roles and responsibilities
 - Skills and competences