

Getting ABM right: why do Japanese factories hold the secret?



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It always starts with good intentions.

But if you're like some B2B brands, your attempts to build a successful ABM program never quite work out. It could feel too complex, or maybe there's a lack of internal stakeholder buy-in. One thing's for sure, without a structured process, the results you'll get will be, at best, pretty mixed. And, at worst, non-existent.

Which is where kaizen comes in.

Read on to learn more, including how a kaizen approach could transform your approach to ABM and reduce months of planning to just days.

A different approach.

Kaizen is a Japanese word meaning "continuous improvement".

Traditionally, a kaizen approach is associated with optimizing processes on a factory floor. This could be figuring out ways to save time or improve safety during the manufacturing of goods.

Fundamentally, it's about making incremental changes that will make a long-term difference. Usually, a kaizen process will happen periodically — getting a team together at set times to adapt ways of working to ensure success and growth.

But, when used correctly, kaizen principles can be applied to business growth efforts — like ABM.

Applying kaizen to ABM.

Compared with traditional marketing, Account-Based Marketing (ABM) relies on heavily targeted, personalized marketing efforts. But it requires a huge amount of planning, research, and coordination between multiple teams.

Thankfully, there's a better way.

ABM meets Kaizen.

By applying kaizen principles to marketing and sales activities such as ABM, B2Bs can take advantage of the incremental improvements that can make the difference between success and failure.

The fundamentals of kaizen include bringing everyone together to create a list of problems and opportunities, collaborating to find solutions,

and then testing and measuring the success of those solutions. If further improvement is needed, the process is repeated.

With a kaizen approach, you can overcome some of the classic hurdles holding you back from ABM success.

1. Productivity challenges.

To create a successful ABM program, a huge amount of work needs to be completed, including identifying targets, prioritizing audiences, choosing strategies, and developing assets. This can be hard to do while team members all have other, sometimes competing, priorities.

A kaizen brings all the relevant people together and, by focusing all their energy on one task, fosters a huge amount of productivity in a short period.



2. Team divides.

ABM requires multiple experts across the organization to work seamlessly together — including sales, marketing, accounts, creatives, and product and industry specialists.

By ensuring your kaizen agenda gives each team an opportunity to share their perspective and expertise, you can harness collaboration and communication while breaking down silos.



3. Continuous improvement.

As I mentioned earlier, the essence of kaizen lies in incremental improvements over time. By bringing teams together to plan an ABM strategy with a kaizen, those members can go back to their teams with a clear plan of action.

But it's not a one-time initiative. When viewed as an ongoing journey, you can use kaizens on a bi-annual basis to foster feedback loops, use insights and results, and find ways to optimize campaign performance further.



Inside a 5-day ABM kaizen.

So how do you create a successful ABM strategy using kaizen? We recently ran a kaizen workshop with a client to fill a gap in their pipeline, bringing together sales, marketing, and product teams.

Here's a snapshot of what the process looked like:

DAY 1 – KICK OFF

Defining account segmentation & audiences.

- Ice-breaker and reviewed pre-work.
- Reconfirmed roles and expected outcomes.
- Reviewed, refined, and approved outputs and pre-work.
- Audience prioritization workshop.

1

DAY 2

Positioning & CRM set-up.

- Positioning and competitor analysis.
- Defined and created value prop and messaging.
- Set up CRM platform to align with account-level activities.
- Account profiles built.

2

DAY 3

Stakeholder mapping & segmented messaging.

- Persona research and development.
- Messaging is built to align with personas.
- Priority accounts research and analysis.
- Built stakeholder mapping and org chart.

3

DAY 4

Content creation & customer validation.

- Content scoping and content production.
- Customer review and validation of positioning/messaging.
- Created outreach and activation plan based on all positioning, messaging, content, etc.
- Confirmed metrics and standards.

4

DAY 5

Activation planning & reporting.

- Create campaign flows for 1:1 and 1:Few and 1:Many campaigns.
- Finalized reporting.

5

ABM and Kaizen: 3 steps to success.

Here are three pieces of advice I'd give an organization considering using a kaizen approach to developing a marketing strategy.

1. Plan. Plan. Plan.

Effective planning is essential for a successful kaizen. Make sure everyone's on the same page, establish clear (achievable) goals, and make sure that your agenda gives each team the time they need.

2. Be clear on outcomes.

A kaizen is all about having a clear picture of the desired outcomes from the process. By agreeing on these beforehand, you'll be able to tailor the week to your goals and everyone should be happy with the outcome.

3. Bring in the right people.

Having the right people in a kaizen session is critical for success. Those 'right' people should ideally come from different departments to help generate a sense of collective buy-in and to ensure you capture a diversity of perspectives and ideas.

Achieving your growth goals.

When it comes to achieving growth, it's easy to get caught up chasing short-term leads with 1:many marketing techniques.

But by targeting a select group of high-value target accounts with personalized messaging, you can achieve enormous success.

And, when you use a kaizen approach, developing an ABM strategy becomes a far more productive process. Suddenly, planning work which would take months of back-and-forth conversations can be achieved in just 5 days.

To discover other ways to transform your marketing efforts, visit ledgerbennett.com.

