

EBOOK / GUIDE

THE FUTURE OF EVENTS: ABM STRATEGY

Digital • Hybrid • In-Person



ENGAGE EVERYWHERE

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A blurred background image showing several people in a meeting or conference setting, with one person in the foreground looking down at a device.

Why Account Based Marketing (ABM) Should be at the Center of Your Digital & Hybrid Events Strategy

There's no denying that the events industry has taken a hit in 2020. COVID-19 has brought not only in-person events, but nearly all face-to-face activity to a halt, forcing businesses and event professionals into overdrive to find a way to still deliver on their business goals for the year despite the screeching halt.

For many businesses, the most logical short-term solution is to shift to digital events, where messaging and content can still be shared without requiring physical attendance. And looking ahead to the long-term, the rise of hybrid events will aim to take the best of both worlds by bringing people together both in-person and online.

With this has come an increased demand for flexible technology that can quickly and smoothly adapt to a changing event strategy, while maintaining the impact of in-person experiences. And while this collective shift to digital events has enabled businesses to keep the engine running, it comes with its own set of challenges. Technology aside, how do you truly personalize an attendee experience when your events go digital?

The move to digital allows you the opportunity to reconsider your events strategy and programs as a whole. Consider:

- How do you offer highly engaging experiences for your attendees across a series of digital events?
- Is there an opportunity to create micro events that are highly tailored to specific audiences?
- When converting a large in-person conference to a virtual or hybrid experience, how can you ensure that you're offering each individual attendee some semblance of the energy and momentum that comes from connecting with people face-to-face?

The answers to these questions are varied, but there's a strategy hiding in plain sight that most event marketers and professionals can easily tap into while mapping out their digital and hybrid events.

The Partnership Between ABM and Events

If the past few years have taught us anything, it's that account-based marketing (ABM) and events go hand-in-hand.

Whether you're hosting, sponsoring or attending, events provide sales and marketing teams with key insights that can help establish and deepen relationships with prospects and customers, so applying an ABM strategy to events allows you to focus your time and efforts on engaging with a set list of priority contacts within your target accounts.

Above all, the priority of any event strategy should be centered on both educating and engaging attendees, as well as accelerating the sales pipeline.

Events are most effective when they put engagement with prospects and customers at the core of your strategy — both for measuring an event's impact on revenue, and to help optimize your events strategy for maximum results.

By taking an ABM approach to events, businesses are able to use (and grow) the intelligence they already have on priority prospects and customers to take their relationship to the next level.

Now, let's apply this to digital events...

ABM for Digital & Hybrid Events

Hyper-personalized micro events/event series

While the future of larger tentpole events is unclear under the present circumstances, there's a clear path forward for both in-person and digital events that puts your target accounts front and center.

By taking a step back from large-scale events and focusing on smaller, hyper-personalized events (or series of events), businesses have an opportunity to stand out and deliver their message.



Events are most effective when they put engagement with prospects and customers at the core of your strategy.

► Planning

Start by asking some key questions to help identify how you can best plan for a highly personalized digital experience for your attendees.

What do you know, need to know about the needs and interests of your target accounts & contacts?

- Industry
- Persona
- Role
- Interests, needs and pain points



Define your event objectives

Numbers are important, so make sure to set clear goals and objectives that you plan to achieve from your event. Use tangible numbers where relevant, for example:

- Number of attendees from target accounts
- How many qualified leads you aim to generate
- What those numbers look like in your sales pipeline in dollars, etc.

Use these goals to help measure success after the event has ended.



Sync your technologies

Ensure that all of the data you plan to gather is connected!

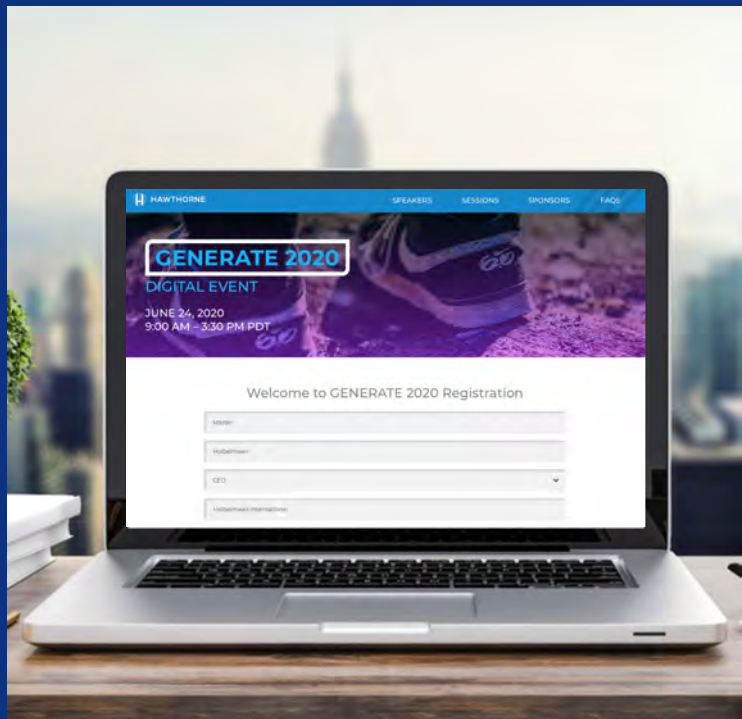
Work with your event technology partner to ensure that all of your micro-event data is integrated and synchronized with your sales and marketing software stack (marketing automation, CRM, etc).

How can I capture useful data from attendees to inform my content, agenda and marketing?



Registration Forms

Event registration forms allow you to gather valuable attendee insights from the start. Use this as your opportunity to learn more about your attendees needs and interests, using custom logic to identify attendee type, goals and interests, and actionable buying signals to help inform your communications before, during and after the event.

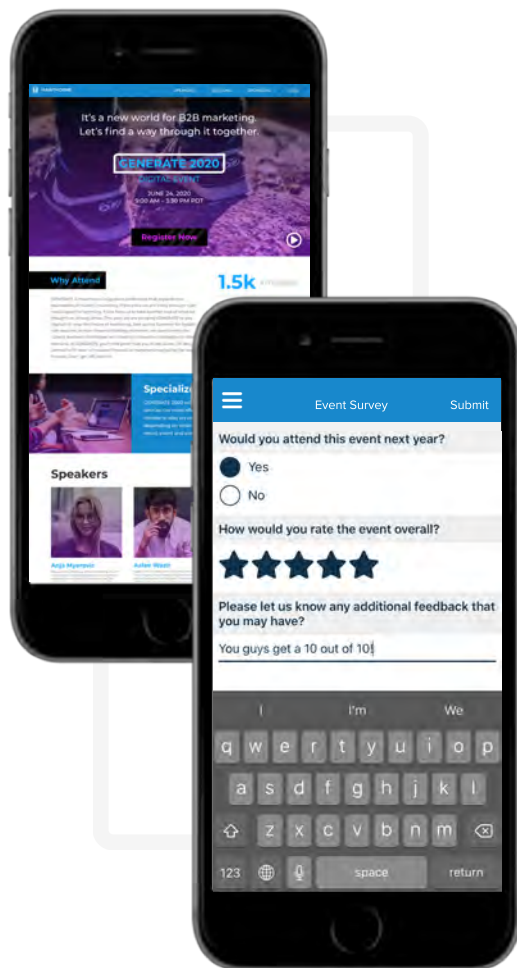


Event Mobile Engagement App

An event mobile engagement app will allow you to capture greater insights from attendees no matter where they are. Use your event app to offer relevant, personalized content and notifications to attendees before, during and after the event, and encourage attendee interaction through features such as:

- Live Polling & Surveys
- Social Wall / Activity Feed
- In-App Messaging
- Gamification

Event apps are a great way to allow attendees to share their insights and feedback about your event. Offer attendees a second screen to access content, ask questions, and more while attending your event.



► Execution

Once you've built out a comprehensive profile for your attendees, and have a clear picture of the types of insights you're looking to collect, it's time to start looking into how you can best execute a tailored event. Consider:

Offer custom sessions & tracks based on:

- Industry
- Personas
- Roles/job titles
- Interests/needs/pain points

By understanding your audience and what interests them, your demand generation team can then use that information to help determine their targeting parameters for online ads, which mediums to use, and what content would be most appealing to them.



For example:

- **Industry:** Healthcare
- **Persona:** Operations
- **Role:** Supply Chain Manager
- **Interests/needs/pain points:** Finding cheaper medical supplies for VA hospitals.

Now your demand generation team can target a highly specified audience. They may use LinkedIn to target everyone who works within the Healthcare industry, across a specific region, and that have the job title "Supply Chain Manager." Further, by working closely with the marketing team, they can put together a specialized event based on their pain points and interests.

With an ABM strategy, you can get even more specific. Using the same example, instead of focusing on the healthcare industry as a whole, you can focus on specific companies within the healthcare industry. Depending on your product or service, there may be more than one persona that has "purchasing power" and are decision makers. Target specific accounts and make sure you consider all the relevant decision makers and buyer personas within that specific account.

With that in mind, your demand generation team can then optimize their ad campaigns even more by targeting their ads specifically to those working within company "XYZ," and who work across multiple different job titles and functions.



Find new and creative ways to boost attendee engagement

Increase engagement through tailored lunch and learns, online networking opportunities or virtual happy hours that connect attendees with one another, as well as with your business.

- Design your themes or topics based on information collected from your registration forms, then offer attendees a choice between each theme or topic.
- Be creative! Evaluate what has worked for you both in past digital and in-person events and consider how this best applies to your upcoming event. Every event offers a new experience to try something new, so find a way to blend new ideas and old to help drive your attendees to interact and engage.
- Designate a member of your sales and/or marketing teams to help manage each experience and be on-hand to engage with and educate attendees (and gather valuable insights for post-event follow-up!)



If sales meetings and networking are the primary objectives for your event:

- Offer specific breakout times within the event itself to encourage more interaction with sponsors or decision makers.
- Offer incentives such as 'backstage passes' with a keynote speaker, an exclusive workshop for VIPs, or direct mail gifts for more senior titles - all of which can result in more interaction with that prospect. Think about what is likely to appeal to that persona when creating such experiences.
- Produce additional assets in tandem with the event that address your target accounts' specific needs.
- For hybrid events, plan a simultaneous or adjacent small-scale in-person event on-site, or think of ways to amplify the target accounts' presence within the digital event so that you, the hosts, can interact with them more.
- Include opportunities within your promotional campaigns and event apps to connect with relevant titles within target accounts, regardless of seniority. Land and expand!
- When promoting these kinds of incentives, remember to keep in mind what's important to that persona, and tailor your communications to reflect that understanding.

► Examples

Certain works with a number of enterprise companies who have converted to or increased their digital events in 2020.

Here are some examples of what we're seeing from our customers as it relates to their ABM for digital events strategies:



Customer Profile: National Health Care Provider
Event Type: Annual client meeting, hosted as a weekly reoccurring event throughout the month of May
Size: 900-1000 attendees

With the onslaught of COVID-19, this national healthcare provider needed to ensure it's healthcare professionals were informed and up to date with the latest information that would enable them to keep their patients and themselves safe. They began to host regular town halls and encouraged their healthcare professionals to interact and engage via the Certain Touchpoint event mobile engagement app that enabled the healthcare professionals to ask questions, and fill out polls and surveys related to topics that were most relevant to them.

The opportunity for interaction and engagement isn't isolated to a single town hall, as the health-care provider is using the app as a central hub of communication and resources on an ongoing basis. They are pushing relevant and timely information to their healthcare professionals in an effort to combat the spread of the virus and to ensure the safety of the providers and their patients.



Customer Profile: Information Technology Provider

Event Type: Bi-annual partner meeting, hosted over the course of 3 weeks for the month of April.

Size: 200-300 attendees

When their in-person events were scuttled due to COVID-19, this information technology provider quickly pivoted to building out a series of digital events to stay connected to their customers and prospects and generate demand. Using Certain Digital, they built out an event website and session catalog that promoted a series of event webinars, with each session or webinar catering to a different persona.

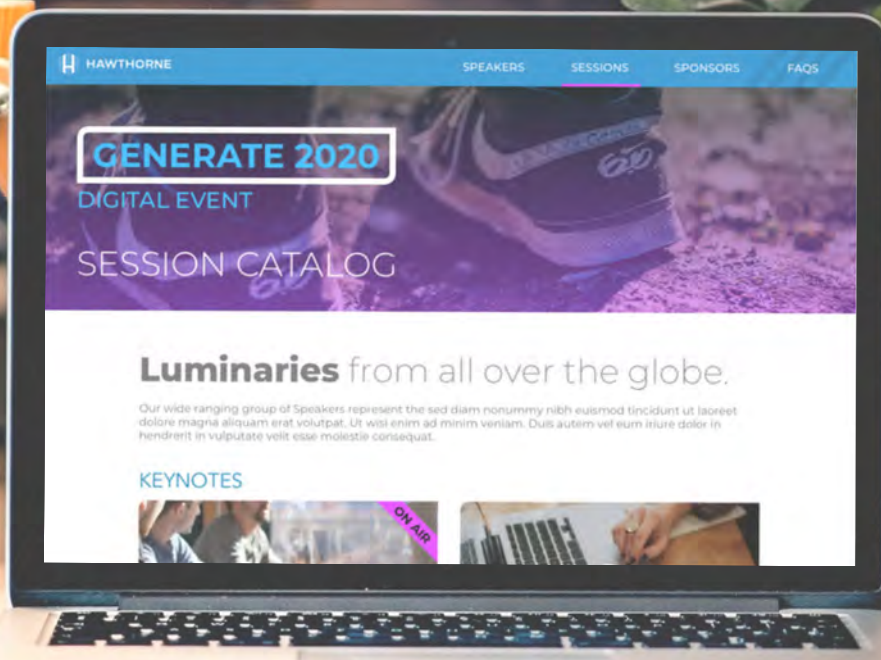
Capturing a little bit of additional detail on registrants of their digital event series, the IT provider is able to promote relevant sessions based on their attendees' noted interest. Their attendees are then able to access both live and on-demand content directly from the session catalog.

As sessions are attended and viewed, the IT provider uses this intelligence to follow up with timely offers and content to that specific account and individual. By incorporating an ABM strategy into their digital event, they were able to increase the number of views of their content by 125% and push higher quality leads into their pipeline.



125%

Increase in content views
for their digital event.



Sales & Marketing Alignment in Action

The beauty of ABM is that it helps sales and marketing teams get aligned around a highly personalized approach that puts target accounts at the core of your strategy. Leads are 67% more likely to become clients when sales and marketing teams are aligned, so applying an ABM strategy to your digital events is crucial to helping create new business opportunities.

“Events are a catalyst for bringing sales and marketing together — both to help generate demand and to deepen relationships with customers.” notes James Huddleston, VP of Marketing at Certain.

When it comes to events, marketing and sales teams need to work together to determine which accounts you’re trying to get in front of and where they are in the buying journey. This will influence the actions your teams take before, during and after the event.

Here are a few ideas of what that looks like in action:

► FOR EVENTS THAT YOU ARE HOSTING:

Host a series of highly tailored micro events focused on the specific industry, personas, or roles within your target accounts.

Right now, more than ever, people are tied to their screens like never before. In order to truly stand out in a sea of digital events, webinars and virtual team meetings, consider taking a step back from larger “catch-all” events and focus more on smaller, tailored events that cater to the specific needs, pain points or interests of your top prospects.

By focusing your efforts on smaller, custom events, you have the opportunity to both effectively share your message and make an impact with your attendees.

► FOR EVENTS THAT YOU ARE SPONSORING OR ATTENDING

Identify Target Prospects

During sales & marketing war room meetings, work together to identify a “most wanted” list of contacts from your top target accounts.

Look into hosting or partnering on an activity that requires registration (virtual or in-person networking opportunities - VIP dinner, happy hour, etc.)

This lets you capture top-of-funnel contact information that marketing and sales can use to determine if the person registering is from a company on your target account list. It also can help you find “lookalike” accounts, or accounts that match the profile of your target accounts.

Based on the discovery of who will attend, sales and marketing can determine strategic ways to engage with those contacts. For example:

- Marketing can automate email invites and reach out via social media to offer a product demo or technical one-on-one
- Sales can then send a personalized invite for the deep dive session



The key here is that sales and marketing are talking with each other throughout the process.

► FOR ALL EVENTS

Tag team on post-event follow-up

How many times have you attended an event where a company follows up with you and treats you like one of any number of attendees who all did the same thing? Chances are that this has happened more than once, and it's a big missed opportunity.


With the information captured through some of the previously mentioned strategies, you should have a better understanding of where your target prospects are in the buying cycle, and what they might want next. This allows you to provide a more tailored experience to prospects and customers, which is going to make any communication with them more powerful.

Sales and marketing should work together to evaluate the insights you now have on your prospects and identify any relevant assets or information that your sales team can then use to initiate highly personalized follow-up communications. Have marketing develop some basic templates to help guide the conversation, but be sure to tailor individual correspondence based on what you now know about each contact.

Tips & Best Practices

► Focus on the attendee experience

Think of how you can deliver the digital event experience to your customers in the most enjoyable way to increase engagement. There's more than one way to share information, and an effective presenter can set the tone for the entire conference. The right speaker can bring an added level of exposure to your event and help to promote your event by name alone.



“Event marketers are increasingly realizing that they need professional speakers to both attract attendees and to deliver better content experiences when folks show up.”

Michael Brenner, CEO of
Marketing Insider Group

Paired with killer content that's tailored to the role, industry or needs of your attendees, the right speaker can help elevate your attendee experience and drive that oh-so-important engagement that makes all the difference when it comes to digital events.

► Personalize your content

Creating personalized and relevant content results in engaged prospects and a higher rate of lead conversion. The personalization of content partially has to do with timing and where your prospect is in the buyer's journey, but also to the specific needs of your company. Is the company you're targeting a SMB and or an enterprise prospect? Does your contact have deep product knowledge and need to learn best practices, or are they gathering up information for an RFP and need a deep dive guide? Matching the asset to the prospect's need is an essential component in effective ABM.

► Don't forget about your customers

While the bulk of your events strategy will be focused on engaging with your target prospects, don't forget that your existing revenue and relationships are crucial right now. Events - whether in-person or virtual - offer new and creative ways to help inform customers about new products and services, and increase retention, adoption and expansion opportunities.

With 97% of B2B customers citing testimonials and peer recommendations as the most reliable type of content, it's important to remember that your customers are your best advocates, so be sure to incorporate them in your engagement strategy. Attending VIP networking sessions, presenting case studies, or sharing mini testimonials during your event will help share their own success stories with your products or services.

► Track the data and results

Every interaction with your attendees can be tracked and evaluated, including:

- Data collected through your event registration form
- Live sessions attended / on-demand videos viewed
- Content downloaded
- Surveys / live polling engagement

It's essential to track all aspects of your digital event campaigns so that you can A/B test, find out what's working, what isn't, refine, reiterate, and develop sophisticated campaigns that lead to conversions.

“Events are a catalyst for bringing sales and marketing together - both to help generate demand and deepen relationships with customers.”

— James Huddleston
VP of Marketing, Certain



► Integrate with your marketing & sales technologies

With anywhere from 30-50% of all sales going to the agent who makes first contact, the ability to act in real time can be the defining factor for successful event ROI. So it's crucial to ensure that any technology - or mix of technology - that you employ for your events is seamlessly integrated with your other sales and marketing technologies.

This will empower your sales and marketing teams to follow up throughout the event cycle with relevant, timely content and offers using a technology solution that syncs attendee data (such as sessions viewed, content downloaded, poll responses, etc) in real-time.



Conclusion

As we make sense of what the future holds for events, much of what we already know from past experience can help inform what next steps should be taken to ensure that events can still deliver the outcomes that they have historically driven. Applying an ABM strategy to your events will not only help you create and accelerate pipeline, but will also help to strengthen your relationships with customers and prospects by putting them at the core of the experience.

Whether it be in-person or online, the event experience still needs to feel personal — perhaps now more than ever.

The power of getting face-to-face with your prospects is irreplaceable, but thankfully there's no shortage of ways that you can still create a tailored event experience for your audience that provides a new opportunity to connect with your most important prospects and customers. By focusing on smaller, bespoke experiences where each attendee is a VIP, you not only have a stronger platform for educating and engaging your attendees, but you are offering a unique and memorable experience to help strengthen those relationships.





Certain is the leading enterprise event automation platform that helps data-driven marketers and event professionals integrate rich buying signals and attendee insights to improve sales and marketing results.

Certain partners with hundreds of companies across tens of thousands of global events to help drive measurable business results from their events.

Visit www.certain.com for more information.

Need a little extra help with your events strategy?
Contact us for a free consultation with one of our event experts.

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