



▶ **The B2G Marketing Playbook**

ABM Strategies for Federal Success

## ▶ Table of Contents

3	<b>SECTION 1</b> Marketing to Government: Account-based Strategies that Connect, Engage and Win
5	<b>SECTION 2</b> Building the Right Message for Government Agencies
8	<b>SECTION 3</b> Targeting Key Decision-Makers
10	<b>SECTION 4</b> Engaging Key Decision-Makers
13	<b>SECTION 5</b> Closer Look: Mapping Content to the Capture Journey
17	<b>SECTION 6</b> Measuring Success
18	<b>SECTION 7</b> Getting Started

## ▶ SECTION 1

# Marketing to Government: Account-Based Strategies that Connect, Engage and Win

- **S1: Market**
- S2: Message
- S3: Target
- S4: Engage
- S5: Capture
- S6: Measure
- S7: Start

Marketing to the federal government is unique. Civilian and defense agencies are tackling society's biggest challenges, which require workforces and budgets that rival — or exceed — Fortune 500 companies. At the same time, these organizations are operating within a distinct regulatory environment designed to ensure the highest levels of security and open competition, all to maximize the value of taxpayer dollars. And then you have the diversity of missions: from the IRS to NASA to DHS, the federal market is home to dramatically different organizations with dramatically different objectives.

The result of all of these factors is a contracting environment that prioritizes long-term engagements with proven partners at significant investment levels. The stakes are too high to risk working with companies that don't understand federal market dynamics and requirements, which is reflected in the way agencies procure products and services. It's a deliberate process that often spans 18-24 months to ensure a comprehensive review of information so that the absolute best vendor is chosen to achieve the mission goal.

In this hyper competitive environment, government decision-makers are looking for partners that truly understand their unique challenges and are deeply committed to delivering the best solution. In other words, winning requires a laser focused, account-specific capture strategy, which provides both an opportunity and a challenge for marketers.

Marketers should ensure their messages work to increase trust and rebuild relationships with government decision makers.

Account-Based Marketing (ABM) strategies — proven successful in the commercial world — are absolutely critical to achieving procurement success in the federal market. Most successful B2G contractors are already employing elements of ABM, but advances in technology, the changing nature of the remote federal workforce, and increased competition require more digital, integrated and strategic approaches.

### WHAT IS ACCOUNT-BASED MARKETING FOR B2G?

Marketing automation provider Marketo<sup>1</sup> defines ABM as a “strategy that concentrates sales and marketing resources on a clearly defined set of target accounts within a market and employs personalized campaigns designed to resonate with each account.” The key word there is “personalized.”

<sup>1</sup><https://www.marketo.com/account-based-marketing/>

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In many cases, an ABM program’s greatest impact will be generated in the run-up to RFP submission, although a steady stream of targeted outreach (as permitted) throughout the procurement process will help reinforce your message. But where to begin? Start with the agency challenge and work back. Stay laser-focused on the problem the agency is solving for, who the key decision-makers are and what they care about the most (you already have a terrific in-house resource for this information; find out more in section 2 of this playbook).

If you become obsessed with their needs, you’ll be in a far better position to understand how your organization can function as the solution. For instance, today’s government buyers are driven by essential mission goals, compliance mandates and rising service delivery expectations. Focus on core issues and opportunities like those, and win themes will appear that you can use in personalized messages across your proposal language, marketing collateral, content and advertising campaigns.

Don’t forget that, along with what you say, where and how you say it has changed in a time when many in your target audience are working remotely, at least part-time. A prime example: teleworking policies and less regulation around federal employees’ use of personal devices in recent years.<sup>2</sup> This means a greater opportunity for digital marketing has emerged, which you can read more about in section 3 of this playbook: “Targeting Key Decision Makers.”

ABM is a modern iteration of how companies have typically marketed to agencies in the federal space, but new tools and strategies are transforming what’s possible and driving new levels of ROI. And it’s this layering of “old school marketing” with new digital techniques is at the core of this playbook, intended to help enhance your existing federal marketing approach and improve your company’s success in the market.

Whether you have a few years or decades of experience with federal contracting, ABM techniques — in particular, digital marketing strategies — can energize your pre-award marketing to get your solutions and your brand noticed.

**CONTENT ACROSS KEY PROCUREMENT STAGES FOR ABM STRATEGIES**

TIMELINE	18 - 24 MONTHS				
KEY PROCUREMENT PHASES	Pre-solicitation		Solicitation	Source Selection	
STEP	Requirements Definition	Acquisition Strategy	Request for Proposals	Evaluation Phase	Contract Award
EXAMPLE CONTENT	marketing collateral, webinars, public relations campaigns, and case studies		white papers and reports	demos, prototypes, past performance, quals, and product specs	

However, before you get to which channels to use, you first need to craft a compelling message to be used by both Marketing and Business Development teams — one that speaks directly to your audience’s pain points and the opportunity itself.

<sup>2</sup> <https://federalsoup.com/articles/2020/09/18/intel-byod-telework.aspx>  
<https://federalnewsnetwork.com/air-force/2020/08/air-force-thinks-its-cracked-the-code-on-byod/>

## ▶ SECTION 2

# Building the Right Message for Government Agencies

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In an ideal world, your ABM messaging strategy would go like this: you've done your account research and your targeting. You've identified the people and the pain points you want to address. Now you just have to create messaging that breaks through the clutter and differentiates you from competitors.

If only it were that simple. There are a lot of elements that go into creating messaging that drives not only engagement, but action. And as always, the key is to start with the agency's challenge... and stay there.

Marketing to government agencies — B2G marketing — has always been about building relationships and solving problems, but too often, companies looking to win contracts focus too much on what they can do, instead of what agency buyers need.

Yes, government decision-makers want to hear about industry solutions,<sup>3</sup> but they also want to know how what you do applies to them. The more you talk about your company, solutions, expertise without providing context as to why those things matter to that audience, the more likely you'll lose their attention.



Content needs to reflect not only your understanding of the agency's issues — from pressing mission needs to compliance mandates — but how your audience can overcome the obstacles to success.

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The specific opportunity will spell out the results the agency wants to achieve and even key phrases you may want to highlight.<sup>4</sup> This will inform your messaging in another, critical way: talking about concepts and outcomes using the same language as the agency does. This shows that you're paying attention, seeing things from their perspective while building a common foundation for a conversation.

Beyond the RFP and other provided sources, such as Industry Day presentations, research should extend to a bigger-picture understanding of the problem, including what's been tried before. Search news sources, analyst reports, and government sites to find clues to the scope of the problem. But there's another vital source of information for messaging.

**THE ANSWER MAY BE CLOSER THAN YOU THINK**

Business development (BD) and capture teams are closest to the customer and the RFP, and should be able to provide insights that inform message development. The reality, though, is that marketing and BD in many government-facing vendors are often siloed and even disconnected. Marketing is supposed to handle the top-of-funnel branding, awareness and lead generation, then hand things off to BD for follow up and capture. Increasing integration and collaboration across these two teams can deliver huge rewards for your entire organization.

	RELATIONSHIP BUILDING & AWARENESS	PROCUREMENT
<b>STAKEHOLDERS / DECISION-MAKERS</b>	IT influencers, Org SMEs, CxOs	IT buyers, CxOs
<b>PRIMARY MESSAGE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand positioning</li> <li>• Solutions &amp; capabilities</li> <li>• Expertise</li> <li>• Corporate narrative &amp; values</li> <li>• Thought leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rearticulation of the core problem/opportunity</li> <li>• Opportunity win theme</li> <li>• Company differentiators</li> <li>• Thematic thought leadership</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.merrittgrp.com/mg-blog/b2g-marketing-for-federal-rfp-success>

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Part of the issue is cultural; the separation between marketing and BD has been around for a long time, so why fix something that seems to work? One of the toughest hurdles for BD is to differentiate a technical solution based on something other than price. Marketing can help BD identify competitive advantages and solidify — or transform — your brand’s identity with the customer.

At the same time, BD’s input and up-close knowledge of the agency and the audience helps marketing produce materials that get those points across clearly.

With a messaging strategy focused on customer needs in place, you can then craft an outreach program that shows your unique ability to solve their specific problems.

For contract-specific campaigns, this synergy is essential. The right win themes and copy points can inform the RFP response and be the foundation of digital marketing, website updates, events and an array of content (such as blogs, bylines, collateral, eBooks and videos) that showcase your unique understanding of the problem and how to solve it — all in language that speaks to them. In doing so, you show your government prospects what’s possible, and deliver confidence in your solution.

## Messaging in Action: Asset Checklist for BD/Marketing Collaboration

### STRATEGIC ASSETS

- Win Themes
- Primary & Secondary Messaging
- Buyer Personas
- Website/Landing Page
- Social
- Media

### TACTICAL ASSETS

- Battlecards
- Scripts
- Product Demos
- FAQs
- One-pagers
- “How to” Guides
- Sales Decks & Presentations

## Targeting Key Decision-Makers

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With synchronized win themes and messaging established across BD and marketing, the next step is targeting the right decision-makers. Luckily, the targeting process is similar in a lot of ways to how it's done in the commercial market, but with a few unique differences.

One of the most important differences is understanding how technology is procured across the federal government and the role of essential procurement oversight agencies such as GSA, OPM, OFPP, DISA and others.

The way a solution is researched, sourced, selected and procured can vary from contract to contract, and many of these organizations that provide services to multiple other agencies can often be the source of larger contracts. On the other hand, there is frequently a small group of people that will ultimately decide which vendor to partner with on any given contract.

The other challenge with targeting federal decision-makers, buyers, stakeholders, influencers and end-users is that many agencies have strict policies and security requirements for accessing technologies and information on government-issued devices and within federal facilities. Over the past few years, federal personnel have become more and more willing to

interact across digital channels. Federal workers feel more comfortable browsing content on their personal devices now that they're not working from a secure government office setting. While a digitally-driven ABM strategy can work well in the government market — especially as work-from-home becomes more common among personnel — understanding the nuances of targeting, campaign development and outreach is essential.

### USING DATA TO TARGET FEDERAL DECISION-MAKERS

Just like in the commercial space, any federally-targeted ABM strategy should take an integrated approach across online channels such as web, search, social, media partnerships and virtual events — along with offline activities, such as physical events and OOH advertising (with considerations around access to physical locations that may be limited).

Many downstream decisions, including determining the media mix and channel strategy, start with great data. This consists of valuable information about your target audience that you already possess — contact information, previous behavior and intent — combined with details that data providers can deliver to fill gaps and model your addressable audience. As discussed previously, there are two essential targeting considerations that center on two primary sales challenges. The first is growing relationships at an agency, or a set of agencies, and building the brand and solutions awareness that will lead to your company being included in future relevant opportunities. The second, when going after a specific contract, is determining the agencies, titles and individuals involved in both the selection and procurement sides of the buying process.

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The key is looking at your data at the account and title level primarily, augmented by contact-level insights, to gauge account reach and penetration to inform sales and BD engagements or future campaigns.



From a data management and analytics perspective, the most valuable information companies have access to is first-party data, whether that's self-sourced or acquired from the many data vendors in the market. This gives a baseline list of contacts that can then be enriched from a variety of additional data sources including account-level, contact level, demographic, firmographic and even technographic data that provides insight on the types of software and hardware the target agency is using already.

Once you have built a model of target agencies, or total addressable market (TAM), layer on other information such as intent, or behavioral, data that provides insights on the topics and technologies that target audiences are interested in, or actively researching. Intent data providers collect that information in a lot of different ways — from tracking social media activity to partnering with publishers — then use their own algorithms and tools to normalize the data to match accounts, titles and contacts.

Audience modeling in this way is greatly beneficial because it gives a richer view of your target audience to power marketing campaigns and sales outreach with synchronized messaging. Sales and business development teams can be armed with more prospect and customer insights than they have today, and marketing campaigns can be developed to reach the buyer with the right message at the right time in the buyer journey. It also gives you a single database of your TAM, which can then be used across all of your marketing channels. This ensures that you're reaching the same accounts and contacts across all ad platforms, instead of wondering whether the siloed black-box targeting you set up in your DSP or on LinkedIn or Facebook or Google is reaching the right people.

## Engaging Key Decision-Makers

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Once you know who the key decision-makers are, and what they care about, it's time to find creative ways to engage and start meaningful conversations about how you can help them achieve their vision. This phase of your federal ABM strategy starts with a few questions:

- Where are these decision-makers located?
- Where do they spend their time, both online and in person?
- What do they read?

### **PARTNER WITH PROVEN INFLUENCER ORGANIZATIONS**

The federal community is comprised of a number of influential industry associations and media organizations that bring vendors and government leaders together to discuss collective challenges and opportunities. Whether it's the [Armed Forces Communications & Electronics Association \(AFCEA\)](#) or [Northern Virginia Technology Council \(NVTC\)](#), these organizations already have built-in audiences of government leaders and play a critical role in shaping the perception of contracting partners. They host events, create custom content, produce and distribute popular media publications, manage awards programs and deliver all of this with established credibility.

Research how the decision-makers you care about are engaging with these organizations and maximize brand awareness and thought leadership opportunities that exist.

Are they speaking at [FedTalks](#)? Are they a member of [ACT-IAC](#)? Are they on a panel at [TechNet Augusta](#)? Make sure you have a presence there. This usually involves an event sponsorship, which carries a variety of benefits. The first is brand awareness. Federal leaders want to work with brands that they know and trust.

Ensuring your brand is visible where your target audience congregates is the first step in building that familiarity with key decision-makers, but event sponsorships typically offer thought leadership benefits as well. When building event strategies, keynotes, panel discussions and presentations are all enormous opportunities for contractors to demonstrate they have a deep understanding of the challenges facing a unique agency or segment of the federal market as well as innovative ideas on how to address those challenges.

If an existing event isn't attracting the audience you need to reach on the topics you need to position around, you can work with the aforementioned organizations to build your own. Nearly all of the influential federal media brands have custom event options — both physical and virtual — that leverage the expertise and credibility of their editorial teams and also their reach and relationships with federal leaders. From roundtables to webinars to fireside chats, these media organizations can actually secure participation from the key decision-makers you need to build relationships with, in a way that adheres to ethical contracting guidelines.

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## Sample Engagement Forums for a Federal Audience

### KEY MEDIA OUTLETS

- Government Executive
- NextGov
- Federal News Network
- FedScoop
- Federal Times
- Federal Computer Week
- FedInsider
- WTOP
- FedSmith
- Politico
- The Hill
- Axios

- Defense News
- Defense One
- Defense Systems
- Breaking Defense
- Military Times
- Army Times
- Navy Times
- Air Force Times
- Marine Times
- Military.com
- Signal Magazine
- Inside Defense

### SAMPLE OF ASSOCIATIONS / MEMBERSHIPS

ACT-IAC, NVTC, ATARC, PSC, G2X, DRCA, Potomac Officers Club

AUSA, NDIA, AFCEA, Marine Corps Foundation, CIA Memorial Foundation

### EXAMPLE OF EVENTS / CONVENTIONS

ACT-IAC ELC, GSA FAST, HIMSS, Gov't Innovation Awards, Fed 100 Awards

SOFIC, AUSA Annual, Modern Day Marine, AFLOA, DoDIIS, AFITC, INSA, TechNet Cyber

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## REACH DECISION-MAKERS WHERE THEY LIVE

The federal contracting community has a tendency to be a bit Washington, D.C.-centric when prioritizing marketing channels. It's true that much of the senior agency leadership resides around the beltway and that it tends to be a place where decision-makers congregate, but 68%<sup>5</sup> of federal buyers actually live outside of the region. From Huntsville, AL to Colorado Springs, CO to San Diego, CA, federal and DoD buyers have never been more decentralized. And while these folks also consume content produced by the DC-based media brands and associations discussed above, it's also imperative to reach them where they live and have a presence in their communities.

Regardless of where decision-makers are located, there are a few tried-and-true marketing tactics that deliver ABM ROI. Research the local organizations and associations where government and business leaders gather. Find ways to join, participate and build key relationships within these organizations. Identify the most impactful local media channels — both print and broadcast — and engage in relevant conversations through earned and paid opportunities. Explore targeted out-of-home advertising options that reach key decision-makers where they live — from billboards on their commutes to signage near their offices. And finally, government leaders want to work with companies that are a part of their communities and care about the people they employ and serve. Explore local corporate and social responsibility initiatives to make an impact on the region, from supporting veterans transitioning to the private sector to funding STEM education opportunities for local students.

## START MEANINGFUL DIGITAL CONVERSATIONS

As discussed in the previous section on targeting, we are living in the golden age of engaging key agency decision-

There is no shortage of ways for companies to give back, make a difference and demonstrate that they are committed to the local communities where decision-makers operate.

makers online. We can see which social channels they are actively spending time on, we can see which online events they are participating in and we can deliver tailored messaging to the people that matter.

Given these usage trends, our clients are experiencing more and more success with search, social media and programmatic advertising over the past year. For example, a platform like LinkedIn empowers contractor marketers to deliver brand messaging and educational content to the right people in the right roles at the right agencies — even if those target audiences are now working from home.

The key is to consistently deliver useful messages across your ABM campaign — from digital advertising to virtual events to earned media placements and marketing collateral. By staying laser-focused on executing across the channels that reach the specific agency leaders who will decide your contracting fate, you put your company in a position to become a trusted source of information, which is essential to procurement success.

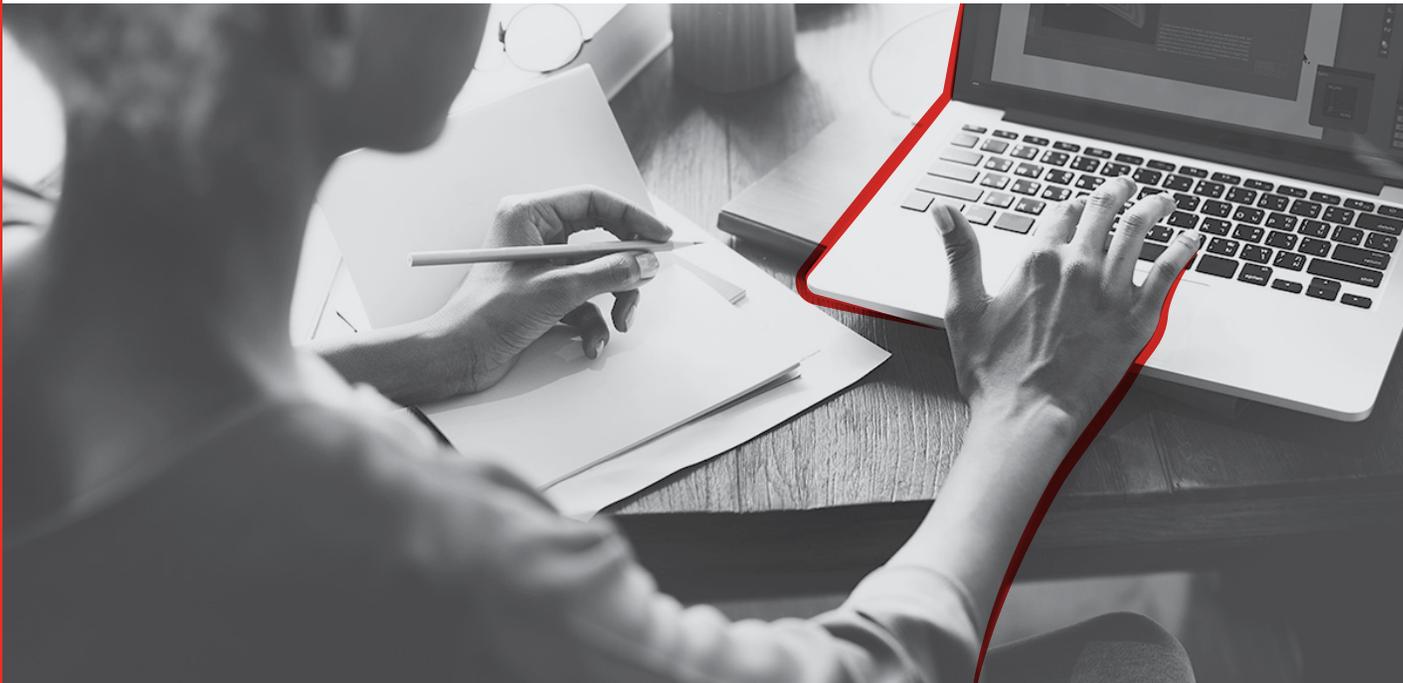
▶ SECTION 5

## Closer Look: Mapping Content to the Capture Journey

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So what is a use case of how government marketing can use these messaging, targeting and engagement in order to make a direct impact? How might we, for example, apply this strategy to the 18-24 month capture journey itself? It's all about harnessing the power of your marketing & sales team's integration in order to deliver the right information at the right time over the key stages below.

With the pace of innovation increasing every year, it's nearly impossible for even the most plugged-in federal leader to stay up to date on the vendor solutions that can transform their agency's mission. They want education about what's available and how it can help them. This need is what companies should harness to become a known entity in federal acquisitions and make it to the down select. From a marketing perspective, content is the best way to deliver that knowledge across every stage of the capture journey.



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## Stage 1. Pre-solicitation

### Determining Needs and Specifications

Federal leaders want to work with vendors that they know and trust. This means establishing your company as a leader, trusted advisor and innovator in the government space. You can achieve this by providing informational content and industry perspective that illustrates a deep understanding of the challenge at hand and the art of the possible. This content empowers agency decision-makers with critical information as they build requirements and expectations for upcoming contracting opportunities.

#### CONTENT RECOMMENDATIONS

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Develop account/opportunity-centric content that focuses on education and can be leveraged in a variety of ways by BD and marketing. It is important to weave “the art of the possible” with threads of what leaders should be thinking about including in an opportunity and why these elements matter. Push any “About Us” sections to the back and let your content become singularly focused on the agency and their challenge; this in turn helps decision-makers hone in on their needs & specifications.

- Marketing collateral
- Webinars
- Public relations campaigns
- Case studies
- eNewsletters
- Video
- Infographics
- Online magazines
- eBooks

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## Stage 2. Solicitation

### Shaping RFIs and RFPs

After showing appreciation for the needs of the organization, it's time for your company's thought leadership and technical vision to help shape the details of the RFP. The goal here is not to prescribe the square peg of your organization's standard offerings to the round hole of the agency's needs, but by taking the time to clearly illustrate that you support their vision and understand what is needed to execute in order to make sure your company is included.

#### CONTENT RECOMMENDATIONS

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Research-heavy content materials illustrate the depth to which your company is familiar with the solution/technology and can differentiate you as a front runner by highlighting your commitment and investment. Agency-specific and market-specific (e.g., federal health, intel, finance) thought leadership assets that showcase your understanding of the unique dynamics of their challenges are also beneficial at this stage of the procurement process. These detailed collateral pieces can incorporate information that can be pulled from the RFI & RFPs.

- White papers
- Reports
- Case Studies
- Product Demos
- Marketing Collateral



## Stage 3. Source Selection

### Narrowing the Field

Or, to put it another way, the “prove it” step. The bid process and down selects that follow are the most heavily defined in federal acquisitions and where some companies erroneously try to begin their efforts. Here is where your marketing content should become a complement to the official proposal and shine the brightest light on your organization’s experience, talent and technological differentiation. In short, showcase why you’re the leading partner to bring the goals of the RFP to life and that your company has done this before.

#### CONTENT RECOMMENDATIONS

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During final selection, the main and most consistent message centers on differentiation and what comparable efforts your company has completed in the past. These content pieces should stay away from outdated PowerPoint presentations; instead focus on polish and a complete vision. It is imperative that the BD, marketing and, now, proposal efforts are in lockstep during the final selection period, so keep the team members in close communication while creating your content.

- Demos
- Past performance
- Quals
- Product specs
- Trials

Considering what type of information is needed at each stage of the capture journey is the key to developing content for federal decision-makers that provides value to the audience... and a leg up for your company.

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## Measuring Success

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Measuring your federal ABM program means that you need to assess metrics at both the account and contact level. Obviously, the ultimate measure of collective marketing and sales success is contract wins, but there are other key metrics to examine along the way.

Consider engagement at the account-level. What is the level of reach and engagement at target accounts? Is it increasing over time? Are you seeing engagement from the right titles and departments at those accounts? Ads clicked, pages visited, time spent consuming content, the amount of content consumed, multiple visits and clicks through to other pages on your website can all be measures of digital engagement. Attendance at events, both virtual and in person, by targets at those same accounts, or increased intensity of engagements over time, can start to paint a strong picture of account reach and penetration.

Beyond account-level metrics, measure engagement with contacts at your target accounts. Are they self-identifying, opening or clicking through emails regularly or answering sales calls or offers for demos? You will want to track the total number of contacts that are being generated by your program over time, segmented by individual agencies, to measure the overall effectiveness of your ABM campaigns.

As with most other forms of account-based marketing, you need to be able to show the impact of an ABM program on your sales process and pipeline. Did your ABM program shorten the sales cycle, increase deal sizes and increase conversion rates when compared to more traditional, market-focused marketing and sales approaches?

### Baseline Success Metrics for Federal ABM

#### DIGITAL METRICS

- Ads Clicked
- Page Visits
- Multiple Visits to Site
- Time Spent on Page
- Number of Pages Visited
- Intent

#### DIGITAL METRICS

- Email Opens & Click
- Answering Sales Calls
- Demo Offers

#### EVENT METRICS

- Attendance
- Audience Titles
- Follow Up Conversations

#### SALES METRICS

- Sales Cycle Duration
- Deal Size
- Conversion Rate

There's one more item to consider: account-based marketing, especially digital tactics, will generate a lot of campaign data at the account, contact and intent levels. This data should inform future marketing, but it should also inform your business development strategies. Which accounts are showing engagement or intent? Which titles at those accounts? And, which contacts? With a solid understanding of how contracting works at these target agencies and equipped with these types of insights, your sales team can plan outreach and prioritize opportunities to close more deals faster.

# Getting Started

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With B2G marketing, it is critical to start with the agency challenge and work back using an ABM approach unifying BD & marketing teams to build on the strengths and capabilities of both. To get started, remember these key takeaways:

**STAY LASER-FOCUSED ON THE CHALLENGE** the agency is solving for, who the key decision-makers are and what they care about. Create win themes and messages that resonate with federal decision-makers using their language.

**TARGET KEY DECISION-MAKERS** using 1st party and intent data to make sure you are placing messages at the right time and on the right platforms in order to nurture relationships for a particular opportunity.

**LET THE DATA IDENTIFY PRIME ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES** of federal leaders when it matters most — from federal organizations to media partners.

**TAILOR THE SUBSTANCE** and type of your content to match the needs of a federal decision-maker throughout the capture journey.

**USE MULTIPLE LAYERS OF KPIS** to get a true measure of the success of your ABM approach, from agency penetration to funnel quality to sales cycle.

In the end, federal decision-makers are just like the rest of us. They're increasingly consuming information across channels and are interested in receiving relevant, useful and educational content that can help them make smarter decisions. The more we understand the barriers they face, the outlets that they read and the ways they prefer to get content delivered, the more effective we can be in nurturing an ABM approach through awareness, thought leadership and relationships (which begins months or years before an RFP hits the street) and leveraging the best ways to reach them.

# MerrittGROUP

Learn how we're applying account-based strategies for B2G leaders, including Samsung, SAIC, ManTech, Microsoft, Elastic — and how Merritt Group's dedicated Government Practice can intensify your capture journey.

**CONNECT WITH US AT [GovernmentITGroup@merrittgrp.com](mailto:GovernmentITGroup@merrittgrp.com)**