Selecting, prioritizing, and engaging target accounts

Sydney Sloan
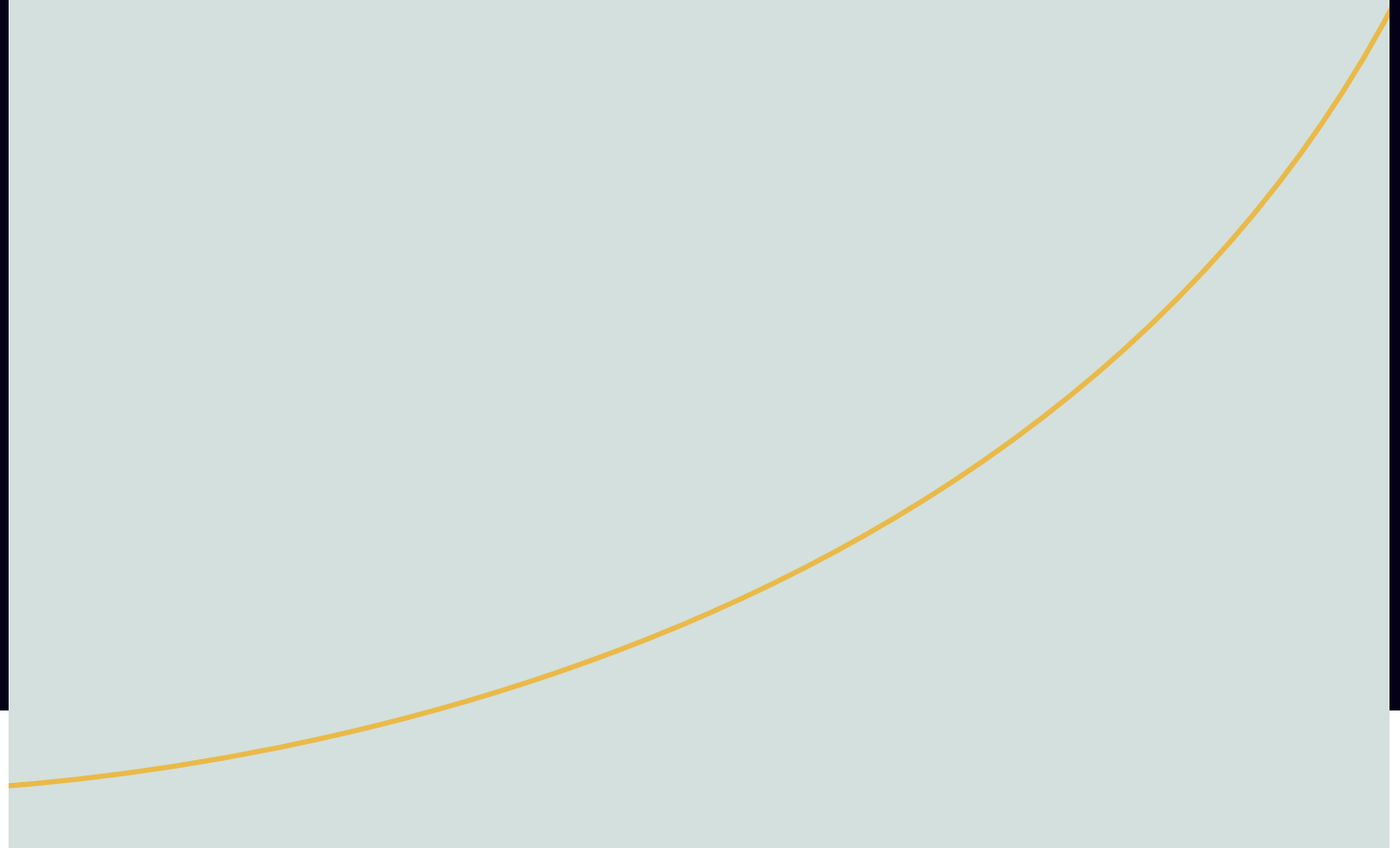**GTM Advisor**

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Summary

While a tightly defined Ideal Customer Profile (ICP) is a core requirement for account-based success when moving into the enterprise, many companies struggle to select the right target accounts to pursue and prioritize. As a result, they waste time and effort targeting the wrong — and often, too many — prospects.

With a target and prioritized list of accounts corresponding to a tightly defined ICP, companies can effectively and efficiently execute an account-based strategy. Marketing and sales will be aligned to the right target accounts when it comes to digital advertising, intent data, technographic and firmographic data, and outcome strategies. Simply put, the tighter the account-based focus, the more efficiently companies can execute inbound and outbound.

The following four steps are a proven way to select, prioritize, and engage target accounts based on my experience helping many companies at all stages — including Salesloft, represented in the examples below — do so.

About the author

Sydney is the CMO at G2 and has extensive global experience marketing software applications that help people communicate and collaborate more effectively.

She is driven by a passion for discovering how companies can deliver exceptional customer experiences by building high performing cultures paired with best-in-class technology. Sydney was the CMO at Salesloft, Drata and Alfresco, and held senior leadership and advisory roles at Adobe, Marketo, Alyce and GoFormz. She holds a BA in International Business and Entrepreneurship from University of Southern California.

As a GTM advisor, Sydney works within the portfolio advising on go to market, demand generation and product positioning.

How we **scaled** this

Overview and results

Challenge

Selecting the right target accounts to pursue and prioritize

Waste time and effort targeting the wrong and/or too many prospects

Solution

An easy to follow, 4-step process for defining the ICP to engaging accounts

Results

Increase in account win rates by 42% from SQL to closed won.

Increase in ASP in target accounts by 35% versus non-target accounts.

Target
Mid-market enterprise

ACV
$50k+

Product

Data providers
ZoomInfo, LinkedIn Sales Navigator, Cognizm

Account Based Platform
Demandbase, 6Sense

Sales Engagement Platform
Salesloft, Outreach, Clari Groove

Gifting
Postal.io, Reachdesk, Sendoso

Define your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP)

An ideal customer profile guides marketing and sales to focus on and best engage the person/people most likely to purchase from the company.
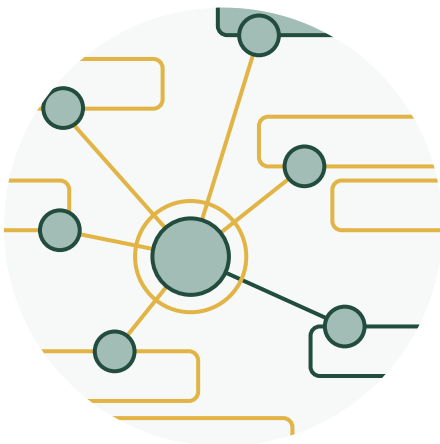
What we did

Created an impactful ICP that answered the question: Whose problem/pain is the company solving that is most likely to buy from the company with the least amount of friction?

How we did it

Met with sales and marketing leadership to develop an ICP based on relevant firmographic, environmental, and behavioral characteristics.

The ICP framework

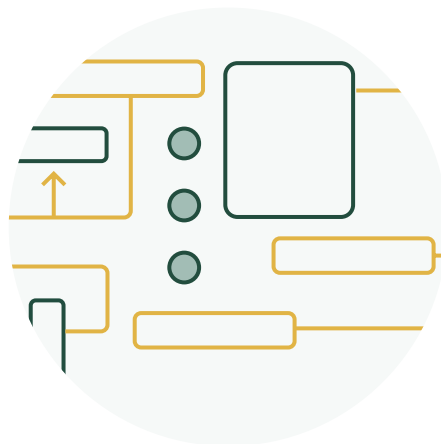

Firmographic

Company characteristics

Annual revenue

Company size

Geography

Number of warehouses

Vertical industry

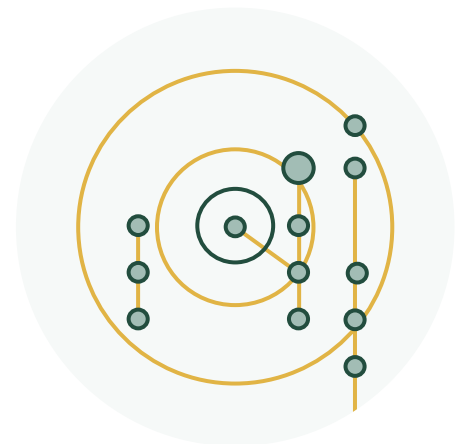**Environmental**

The atmosphere in which the account does business.

Technographics— installed technology

Business model

Internal process

Behavioral

Actions an account takes on an ongoing basis including speaking at leading events, acquisition or litigation.

Strategic directives

New funding

New leadership

Regulation

Business expansion

Why it worked

The ICP focus allows your teams to build messaging for specific types of accounts (vertical, size, current challenge.) **When you match ICP and personas your teams can craft a variety of plays and align marketing campaigns with SDR outbound efforts to engage multiple contacts within an account that forms the buying committee.** A well coordinated and focused approach between marketing, SDRs and sales creates more activities surrounding the account and ultimately converting them to customers.

Top tip

Leverage executive relationships in your existing customer base, board member / investor relationships and your management team's executive networks to foster 1:1 introductions to get to C-level contacts.
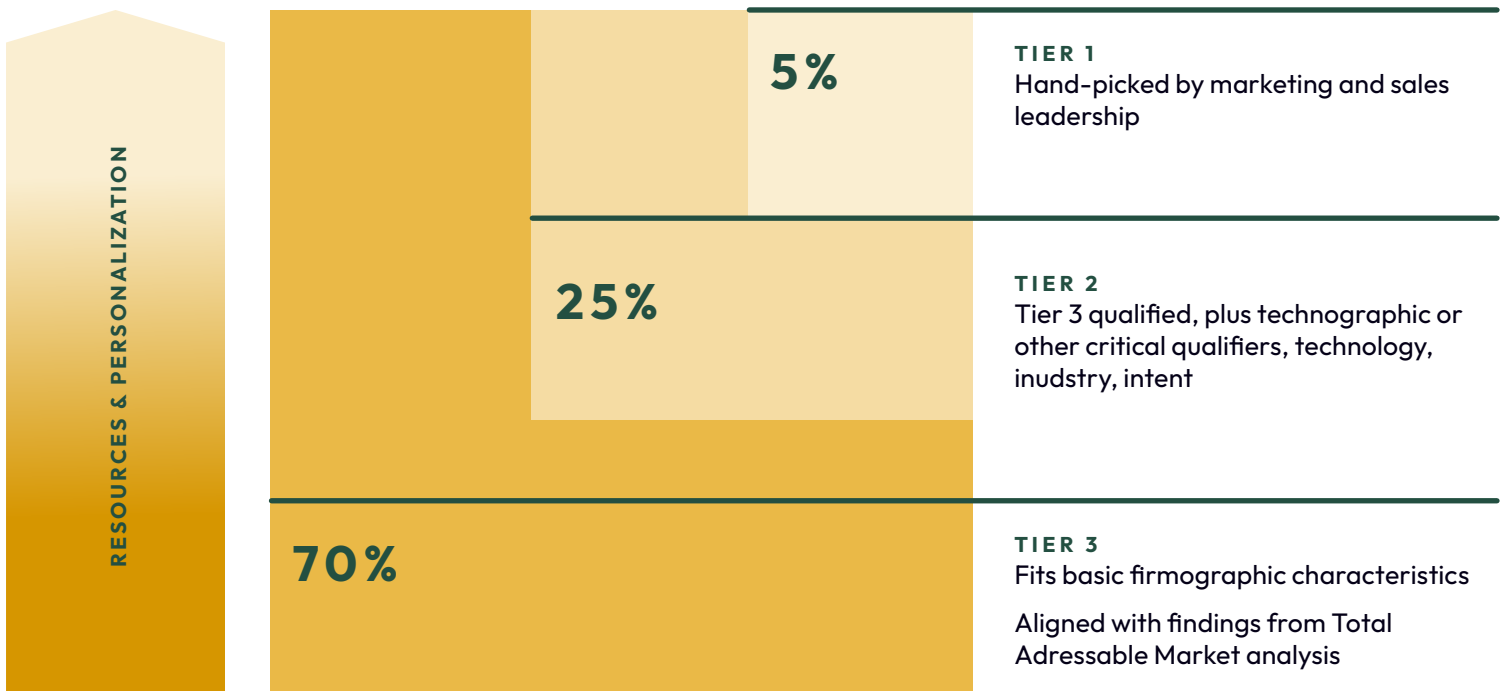
Create a prioritized target account list

Overlaying the ICP against target accounts helps identify the best target accounts.

What we did

We created a subset of target accounts and tiered them to align with the ICP. For example, large enterprises over 25,000 employees in relevant geographies using AWS, one or more competitor solutions, and open-source tech within the specified verticals.

To select the right target accounts, we first called upon basic firmographic characteristics and technographic data aligned with the ICP. Marketing aggregated data to determine the total addressable market (TAM) and then applied qualifiers to that data. For instance, what countries and verticals were priorities for the business?

The Ops team provided the account list along with data — such as account score, firmographics, customer revenue, and engagement to date — to help in selecting. GTM leadership — heads of sales, marketing, and customer success — then selected the accounts, and tiered them using a stack-ranking model based on existing customers and intent data.

RESOURCES & PERSONALIZATION

5%

TIER 1
Hand-picked by marketing and sales leadership

25%

TIER 2
Tier 3 qualified, plus technographic or other critical qualifiers, technology, inudstry, intent

70%

TIER 3
Fits basic firmographic characteristics

Aligned with findings from Total Adressable Market analysis

How we did it

We created different formulas to select accounts vs. prioritizing them. When creating the account score to determine the required number of accounts to achieve the desired market penetration, we used as many inputs as possible to improve the score. We started with firmographic data and narrowed the list with environmental data.

We cross-referenced the data points that mattered to the business against account engagement and intent scores to select top accounts. A larger company with 100 reps might go after 200–300 target accounts. A smaller company with 10 reps might target just 80–100 accounts. Define a formula to arrive at the total addressable market (TAM) you will pursue. For example, a company pursuing 10,000 target accounts overall might end up with 150 (i.e., 5%) in tier one and 2,500 (i.e., 25%) in tier two.

Technographic data helped us further narrow for prioritization. For example, we assigned 5 points to companies using AWS. We assigned 3 points if they used one competitor or open-source offering and 15 points if they used three competitors' or open-source offerings because of our strong consolidation story. We also aggregated multiple intent signals into the prioritization score.

At least once per quarter, marketing and sales leadership reviewed and updated the list. As part of this exercise, you'll remove some accounts and add new accounts to the list. In addition to intent and engagement scores, criteria to consider includes:

In addition to intent and engagement scores, criteria we considered included:

Company size

Their tech spend

Number of end users in the company

For existing customers we determined how many seats they had purchased and their white space.

Why it worked

Base your tightly defined ICP on as much technographic and firmographic data as possible, and keep the target account list to 10,000 or fewer. <mark>Tier-one accounts dictate where you'll increase ad spending and direct mail campaigns, and where field marketing and outbound teams will double down.</mark>

Top tip

Figure out a formula that helps you capture a given percentage of the TAM.

Call upon enough data for account selection but not so much that you can't sort through it in a 30-minute meeting.

Clarify your target against priority accounts

Sales teams need to understand who to prioritize within a list of target accounts.

What we did

Determined who sales reps should prioritize within target accounts by understanding which prospects were already researching solutions that aligned to the company's offerings. In other words, focused reps on prospects showing intent signals.

How we did it

To eliminate confusion, we leveraged intent data from our account-based platform to create an account priority score vs. the actual account score. This provided outbound SDRs and AEs insight into which accounts they should focus their efforts on each week.

TARGET ACCOUNT

Helps rep focus on the **highest quality accounts** as well as understand **marketing resources** at their disposal

"I should prioritize working my top accounts with my manager and put together a plan to engage with marketing."

ACCOUNT ENGAGEMENT SCORE

Helps rep understand **recent account engagement** on both sales and marketing activities

"When the score is high, it's time to work this account more broadly and deeply."

Why it worked

Salespeople can't equally work all target accounts simultaneously.
Intent scores make it possible to prioritize on a weekly basis which accounts they should be swarming.

Top tip

Use A, B, C grades for account priority scores because sales teams often don't understand the inputs to a number score. Such confusion can make it difficult — or even impossible — for them to efficiently prioritize their efforts.

This approach also allows marketing ops to play with numbers to best manage the number of accounts in each grade, such as keeping grade A to 10% or fewer of accounts.

Engage the accounts

The true test of a prioritized list of target accounts is seeing how prospective buyers respond to marketing and sales.

What we did

Orchestrated sales and marketing actions in line with a weekly rhythm to drive meetings and create opportunities for a bigger pipeline.

How we did it

Marketing added the prioritized list of grade A accounts to their campaigns and served multiple ads to target accounts on a set cadence to drive awareness and gauge interest. When accounts started engaging and the intent signal surged, SDRs proactively reached out to **all** personas within the account to expand the contacts within accounts and set meetings with reps.

Why it worked

SDRs used sales engagement best practices for emailing, social interactions, and phone calls to engage as many contacts in grade A accounts as possible. Once accounts were surging, SDRs added contacts to target accounts based on prospects' research and the company's target personas, with the goal of reaching as many people as possible in a target account. To understand performance, we measured:

Number of accounts reached with digital ads within the first 45 days

Level of interaction from personas within these accounts

Top tip

If account selection and messaging is on target — and you call upon an account-based platform to serve digital ads — it's reasonable to expect 80–100% of your target list will see your ads.
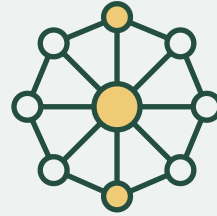
Key takeaways

Use all data at your disposal to select and prioritize accounts.

Educate reps on the inputs so they understand the difference between an intent score and an account engagement score.

Account selection should be a coordinated effort between sales and marketing leadership, not a marketing exercise.
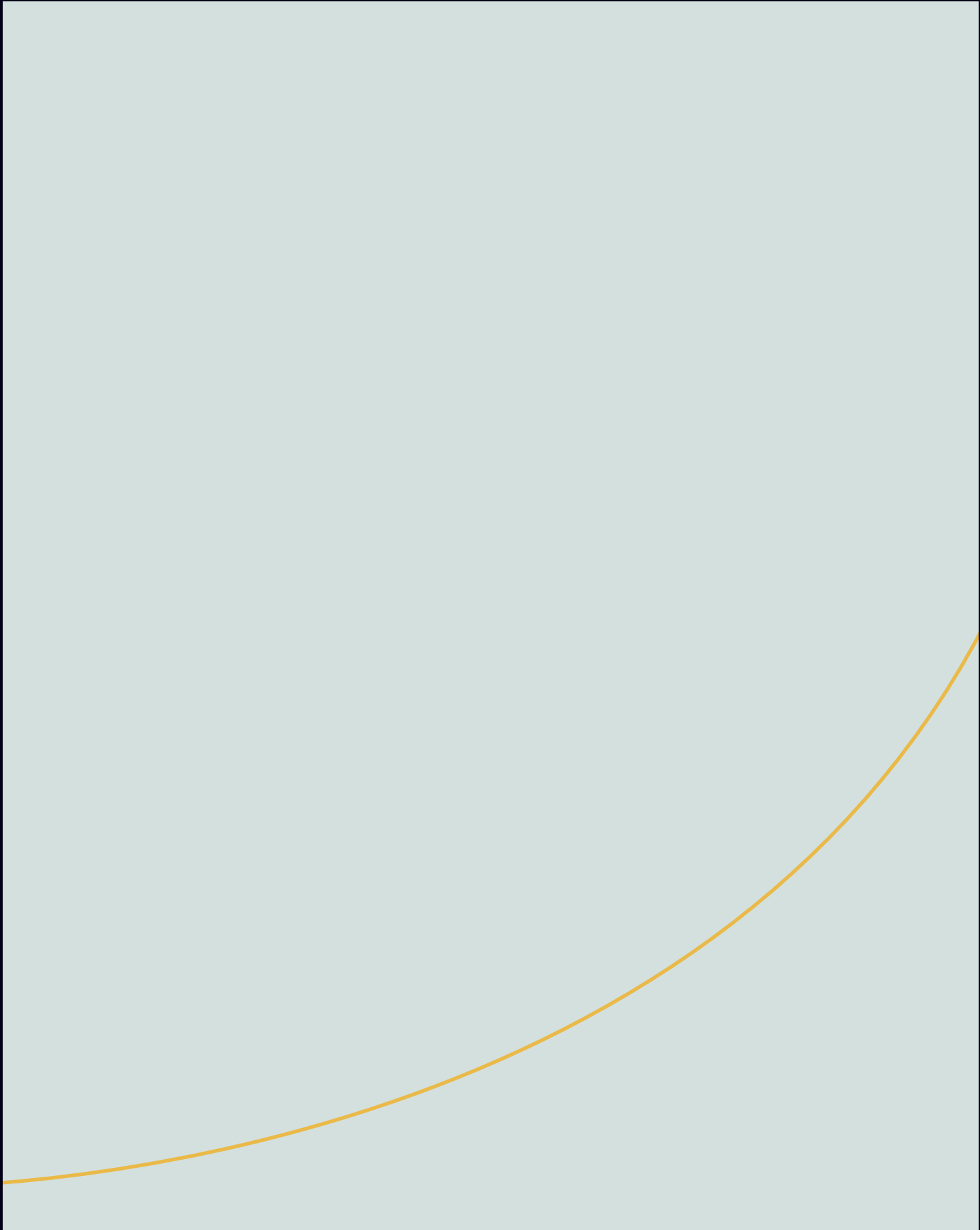
Marketing must move from a lead-based scoring model (MQL) to an account-based scoring system (Interested & Engaged Accounts).

Plan to spend 2–3 months gathering and reviewing all the data necessary to strategically select the right target accounts, and creating a playbook for how to engage those accounts.

SCALE