OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK · Q2 2026

The B2B Buyer *Shortlist* Playbook

Connecting Strategy to Shipped Pipeline through the Dark Funnel.

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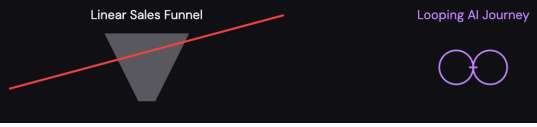
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01

Win the *Shortlist*, Win the Deal.

> The vendor ranked first on the Day One Shortlist wins **80% to 95%** of the time. If you aren't visible before the first call, you have already lost.

THE STRATEGIC SHIFT



Today, 80% of the B2B buyer journey is completed independently. Buyers rely on peer networks and AI engines to build their shortlist before ever contacting a sales rep.

02

Dominate the *AI Discovery* Layer.

> AI engines prioritize **trust** and **fact-density**. Your content must be architectural, not just editorial.

THE 40-60 WORD RULE

Start every section with a definitive 40–60 word "Answer Capsule" to satisfy zero-click search intent.

500-TOKEN CHUNKS

Architect content into semantically complete blocks of 500 tokens for optimal AI retrieval.

VISUALIZING THE LLMS.TXT ASSET

```
# /llms.txt
# Curated feed for AI Agents

[Product Specs](https://domain.com/specs)
[Pricing Model](https://domain.com/pricing)
[Security Audit](https://domain.com/trust)
[API Documentation](https://domain.com/docs)
```


03

Multi-thread the *Anonymous* Buying Committee.

The average committee has expanded to **12 individuals**. They spend **211 days** researching before they speak to you.

THE COMMITTEE MAP



Economic Buyer (CFO)



Technical Validator (IT)



End-User (Dept Head)

Each stakeholder performs independent research through peer Slack groups and AI searches before consensus is formed.

04

Illuminate the *Dark Funnel* Stack.

Software misses **84%** of touchpoints. You need a 3-layer hybrid attribution stack to see the full revenue picture.

THE HYBRID ATTRIBUTION STACK

Multi-Touch Attribution	Software Tracking
Dark Funnel Insights	Qualitative / Self-Reported
Probabilistic Modeling	Incrementality

THE MOST IMPORTANT FORM FIELD

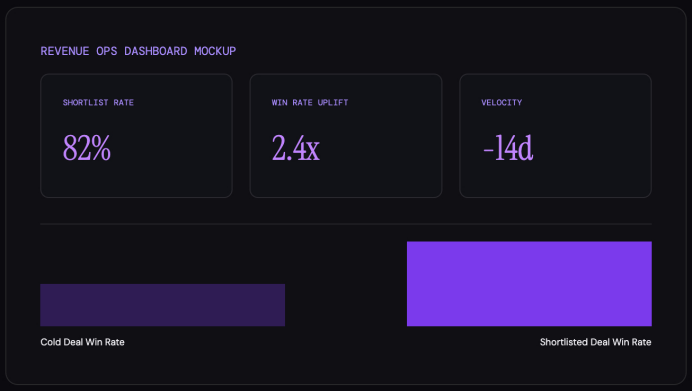
How did you hear about us? (Be specific)

"Mentioned by a peer in the B2B Ops Slack group."

05

Measure *Commercial* Outcomes.

> Shift from vanity metrics to **Shortlist Inclusion Rates**. If you aren't on the list, you aren't in the deal.



06

Immediate *Action* Step.

The first step to winning the shortlist is understanding your current baseline. Execute this audit before your next strategy session.

STANDALONE WORKSHEET: THE 10-OPPORTUNITY REVIEW

Audit your last 10 deals

- ☐ **Interview Sales Reps:** Ask if the buyer mentioned us before the first call.
- ☐ **Map Entry Points:** Trace the first touchpoint. Was it high-intent content?
- ☐ **Competitor Recall:** Which competitors were we always compared against?

"Win the argument when you are not in the room."

Need a Commercial Audit?
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