



Grow  
Intelligently

# Pipeline in Plain Sight:

Predictable Account Expansion  
in Unpredictable Times



# Pipeline in Plain Sight

Predictable Account Expansion in Unpredictable Times

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**CEOs are betting on expansion. Most don't trust their teams to deliver it.**

Enterprise and key accounts drive 60%+ of B2B revenue, and demand is forming inside those accounts right now. Most GTM teams have no system to detect it.

**CRITICAL**  
**71%**  
rate expansion  
critical

**CONFIDENT**  
**49%**  
trust team to  
execute

**GAP**  
**22**  
**pts**

## Signal-driven teams close larger deals faster

**4x** More opportunities

4,270 signal-driven vs.  
1,007 traditional

**71%** Conversion rate

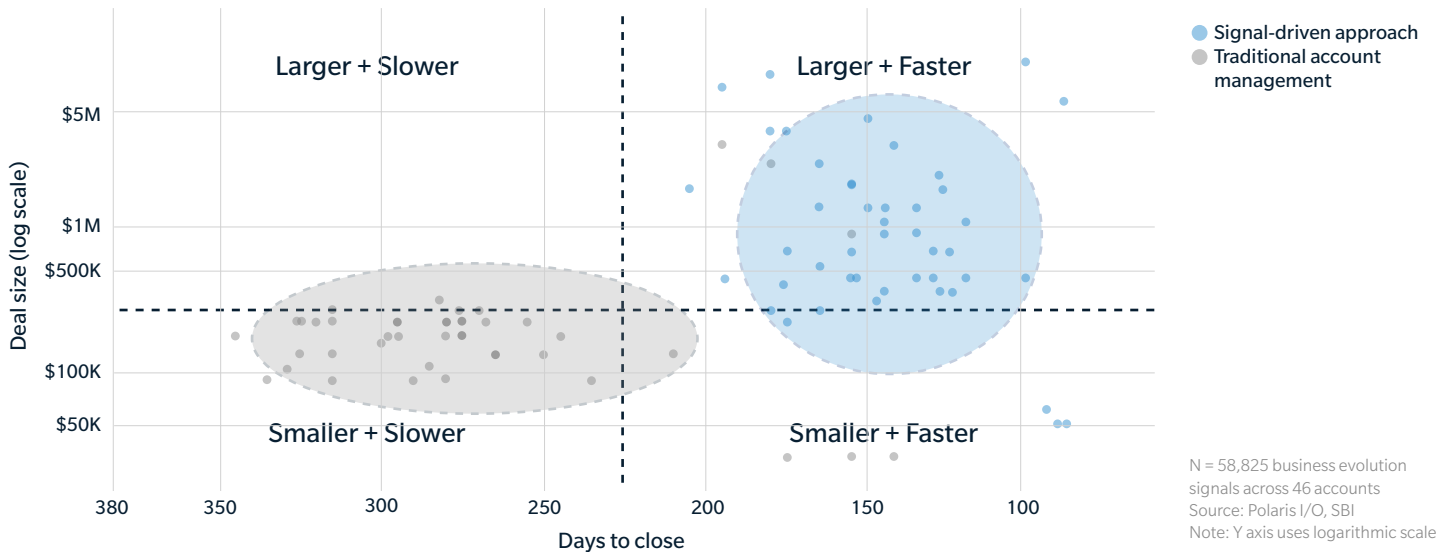
vs. 20% for traditional  
account management

**7.4x** Deal size lift

\$2,602K signal vs. \$350K  
traditional

**128** Days faster to close

144 days signal vs. 272  
days traditional



## Where to focus: 3 signal types drive 82% of closed deals



## When you engage determines the role buyers assign you

### DAYS 0-30

#### Evolution Partner

"What should we prioritize?"

**Trusted advisor.** You shape requirements, budget, and criteria.

### DAYS 30-90

#### Preferred Contender

"Can you do this?"  
**Strong option.** 2-3 vendors compared. Some influence remains.

### DAYS 90+

#### Commodity Bidder

"What's your price?"  
**One of many.** Full RFP. Compete on price, risk, familiarity.

## The 90-day playbook: build signal-driven expansion in one quarter

## FROM START TO INITIAL RESULTS

### WEEKS 1-3

#### Identify your triggers

Map last 8 quarters of closed expansion deals back to the business event that created the need.

### WEEKS 3-10

#### Deploy signal monitoring

Ingest, classify, route signals with context. Pilot top 20 accounts for 90 days.

### WEEKS 4-12

#### AI-powered account guidance

Composite account view. System surfaces prioritized actions. Reps act, not analyze.

### WEEKS 6-12

#### Redesign account reviews

Forward-looking signal review replaces backward-looking pipeline review. FLM runs it.

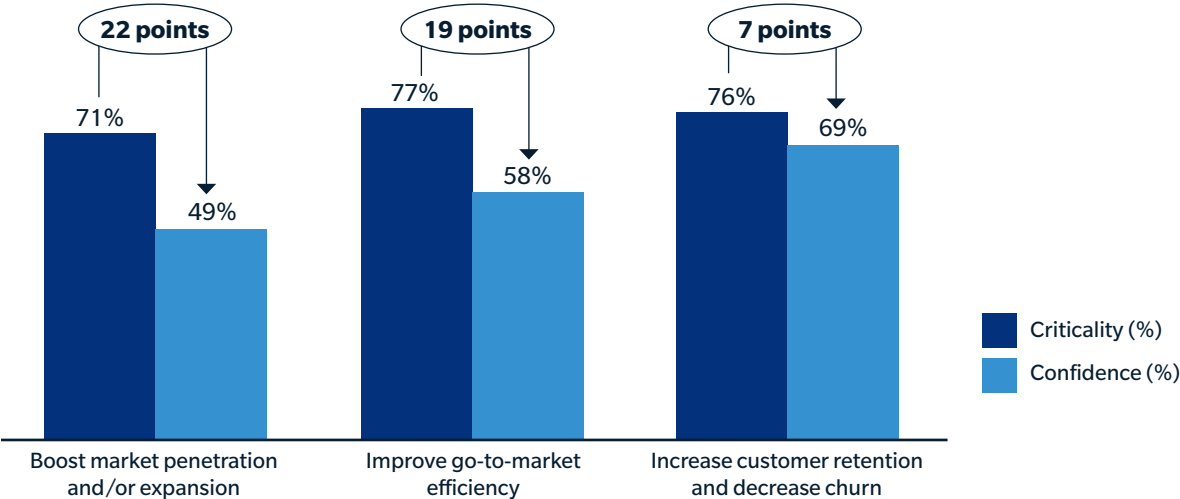
# The expansion gap most teams haven't solved

CEOs are betting on their largest accounts to drive growth but aren't confident in their teams' ability to deliver. Enterprise and key accounts represent 60% or more of total revenue for most B2B companies, and that share is growing.<sup>1</sup> In SBI's CEO survey, 71% rated account expansion as critical to hitting growth targets, but only 49% said they're confident their teams can execute it.

That 22-point confidence gap is the widest of any growth lever we measured. Wider than GTM efficiency (19 points). Far wider than customer retention (7 points). Expansion is a top priority, and one many CEOs don't trust their teams to deliver.

## CEOs prioritize expansion but fewer than half trust their teams to execute it.

Percent of CEOs rating each growth lever critical, vs. percent confident their team can execute



N = 118  
Source: SBI Q4 2025 CEO Survey

The usual explanations for this criticality-confidence gap don't hold up. Most of these companies have invested in account management. They run QBRs, have customer success teams, and have bought intent data platforms. The confidence gap persists anyway.

The reason: demand is forming inside these accounts right now, driven by changes in the customer's business, and most GTM teams have no system to detect it. Customers restructure business units, launch technology migrations, respond to regulatory shifts, hire new executives, expand into new geographies. Every one of these changes creates new needs across the organization. Those needs exist before anyone starts researching vendors, before anyone fills out a form, before any intent platform registers a signal. We call these business evolution signals. They're public, observable, and predictive of expansion revenue. The problem is that almost no one is systematically connecting them to growth opportunities inside the accounts that matter most.

1. SBI Q4 2025 CEO Survey

# How business evolution signals differ from intent data

Most companies have invested heavily in intent data to solve this problem. Intent data tells you who is actively shopping. By the time a buyer is searching for solutions, they've often defined their requirements, set evaluation criteria, and likely engaged at least one vendor.

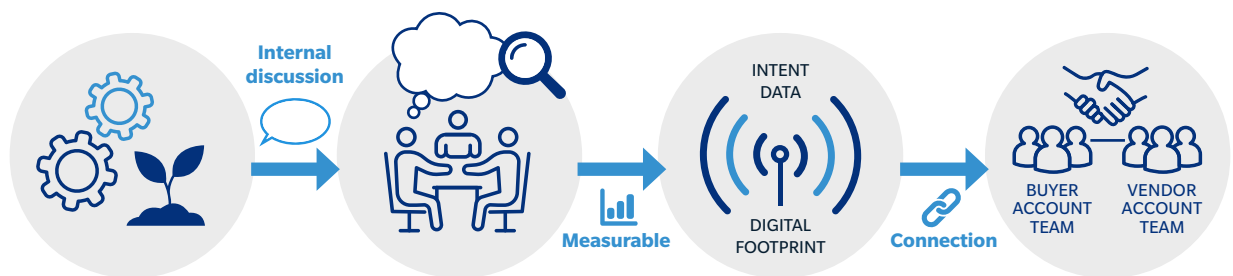
The question is what created the demand in the first place. A customer doesn't wake up and start Googling "enterprise data migration platform." Something changed in their business. A new CTO arrived with a mandate to modernize. A regulatory shift forced a re-evaluation of existing infrastructure. An acquisition created integration requirements that didn't exist six months ago. The business evolution came first. The intent signal came after.

Companies that monitor both layers have an early warning system and a validation layer. Business evolution signals identify the trigger event months before the resulting need matures into active research. Intent data confirms when it does. Companies running only intent data are seeing the second half of a buying journey that started without them.

This pipeline exists inside your largest accounts and is visible. Your teams just don't have a system to see it.

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## Demand exists before intent is formed



### BUSINESS EVOLUTION TRIGGER EVENT

Internal shifts (e.g., M&A, new strategy) or external market changes.

### BUYING TEAM CONSIDERS PURCHASE (UNREGISTERED DEMAND)

Discuss solutions, establish criteria, form buying group.

### INTENT SIGNALS ARE REGISTERED (REGISTERED INTENT)

Website research, content downloads, third-party searches.

### ENGAGE WITH VENDOR ACCOUNT TEAM

Consult on needs, request demos, negotiate scope.

Early demand before most teams engage

Traditional engagement window

# Over 58,000 business evolution signals, 46 accounts, one clear pattern

SBI partnered with Polaris I/O to track over 58,000 business evolution signals across 46 enterprise accounts over 12 months. Polaris I/O provided data monitoring across multiple categories of business evolution, including M&A activity, strategic initiatives, leadership changes, organizational restructuring, technology shifts, and competitive disruptions. The goal was direct: track how often business evolution events activate into buying journeys and how often those journeys result in a purchase.

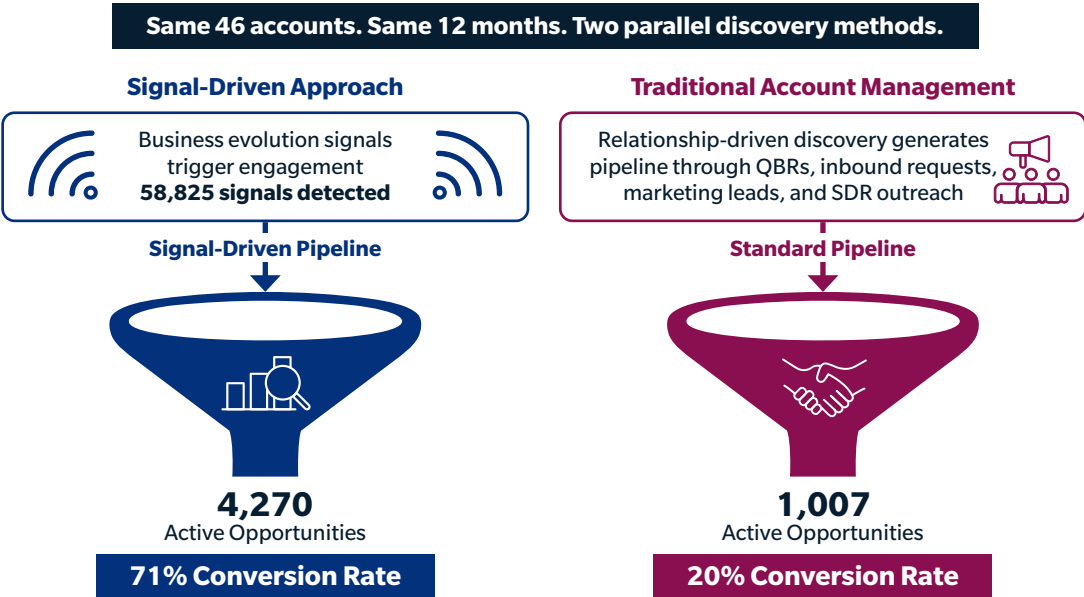
Because the study tracked the same accounts over the same period, the comparison between signal-driven and traditional account management is direct, and the results weren't close.

## Signal-driven teams generate more and better pipeline

After examining 58,825 business evolution signals across 46 accounts, we found 4,270 activated into qualified pipeline and that 71% of those opportunities converted. Over the same period, traditional account management approaches generated 1,007 active opportunities with a 20% conversion rate. These are two parallel discovery methods measured across the same accounts over the same 12-month period. Teams monitoring business evolution signals generated four times the opportunities at more than triple the conversion rate.

Signal-driven opportunities closed at 7.4x the deal value of traditional opportunities and closed 128 days faster.

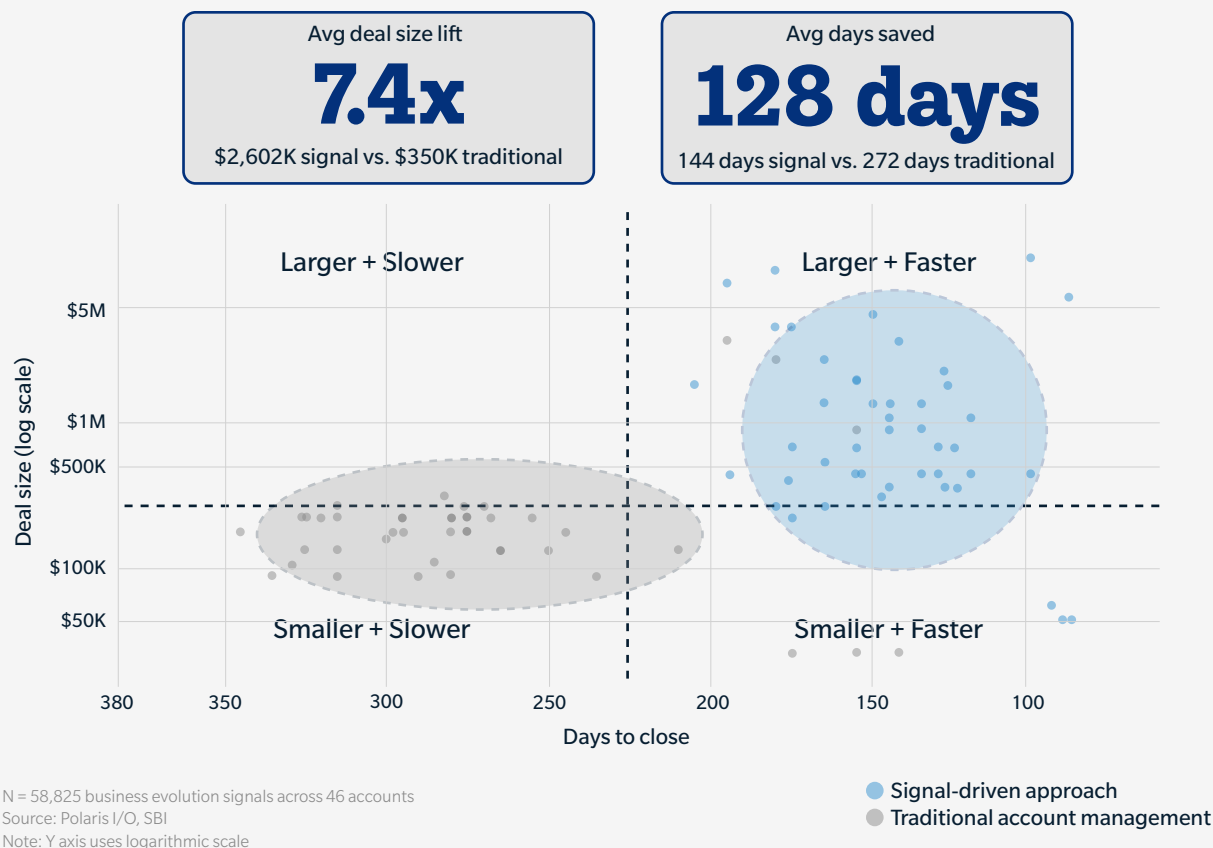
### Signal-driven teams generate 4x more opportunities at 3.5x the conversion rate.



N = 58,825 business evolution signals across 46 accounts Source: Polaris I/O, SBI

Signal-driven opportunities closed at 7.4x the deal value of traditional opportunities and closed 128 days faster.

## Signal-driven teams close larger deals faster



The deal size gap reflects a coverage gap. Signal-driven expansion penetrated an average of 8 buying centers per account over the study period. Traditional account management reached 3. That gap isn't just a coaching problem. Account teams operate at the account level because that's the limit of what humans can observe manually. AI-powered signal monitoring removes that constraint. It lets GTM leaders define "customer" at the buying center level and track business evolution across every buying center in every strategic account simultaneously. That's a different operating model, not a better version of the old one. When your account team knows three people in a Fortune 500 account, the pipeline they can't see is larger than the pipeline they can.

For companies where expansion revenue drives NRR, these results have direct enterprise-value implications. A portfolio company that shifts even a portion of its expansion pipeline from traditional to signal-driven approaches improves conversion rates, deal sizes, and cycle times simultaneously. That combination lifts NRR without proportional increases in GTM headcount, improving both the growth rate and the efficiency profile that drive valuation multiples. In a market where 71% of PE exit value now comes from revenue growth<sup>2</sup>, signal-driven expansion is one of the few levers that compound across the hold period.

Those results raise two questions every GTM leader should be asking.

1. With thousands of signals across accounts, how do teams know which ones are worth acting on?
2. What does it take to turn business evolution events into closed revenue?

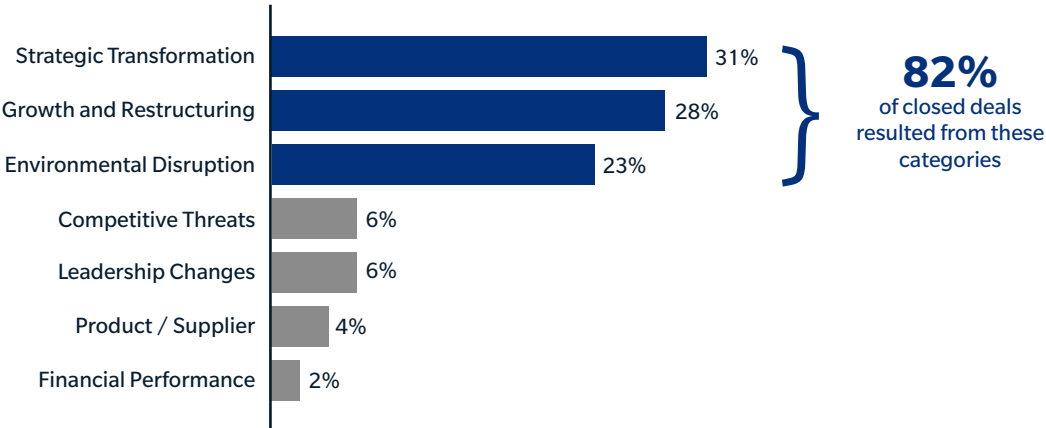
2. Gain.pro, The Private Equity Value Creation Report, 2025. Based on analysis of PE-backed exits completed in 2024.

# Three business evolution types drive 82% of closed deals

The challenge isn't finding signals. It's deciding which to act on. Account teams that try to track every signal across every account get buried in noise that creates work without creating revenue.

Not all business evolution is equal. Three types drove 82% of all closed expansion deals in our study.

## Distribution of closed deals by signal category



N = 58,825 business evolution signals across 46 accounts  
Source: Polaris I/O, SBI

**Strategic Transformation (31%)** (e.g., Strategic initiatives and technology changes) The customer is changing how it operates: digital transformation programs, platform migrations, modernization efforts. These come with executive sponsorship, dedicated budgets, and urgency.

**Growth and Restructuring (28%)** (e.g., Company growth and M&A activity) The customer is getting bigger or reshaping itself. New business units, geographic expansion, and acquisitions. These create infrastructure demand with committed capital.

**Environmental Disruption (23%)** (e.g., Regulatory disruption, legislation, and organizational change) External or internal forces are reshaping the customer's operating requirements. These force re-evaluation of existing vendors and open buying windows that wouldn't otherwise exist.


The remaining 18% came from competitive threats, leadership changes, product/supplier shifts, and financial performance signals. They still produce pipeline, but at lower conversion rates and smaller deal sizes.

Business evolution data has always been public. What's changed is that AI-powered platforms can now ingest, classify, and route thousands of signals automatically, at a cost that makes systematic monitoring economically viable for the first time. But monitoring everything across a 50-account book is still unaffordable and unmanageable. The concentration finding makes the investment case simple: three signal categories produce 82% of closed expansion revenue. For account management and customer success teams, that's where the monitoring budget goes.

# Your response time determines your role in the deal

When business evolution happens inside a customer organization, the clock starts. Requirements form, budgets move, and the window for influence closes. The role the buyer assigns you depends entirely on when you walk through it. Buyers often view suppliers in one of three ways:

## Buyer perceptions shift based on when you engage

Signal event to engagement	Days 0-30	Days 30-90	Days 90+
	<b>Evolution Partner</b> Trusted advisor	<b>Preferred Contender</b> Strong option	<b>Commodity Bidder</b> One of many
Buyer's question	"What should we prioritize?"	"Can you do this?"	"What's your price?"
How you got in	Recognized the business evolution event before the buyer had requirements	Relationship or outreach after needs were defined	Procurement email with an RFP attached and a two-week deadline
Your influence	You shape requirements, budget, and evaluation criteria	You can still shape how they evaluate solutions	Criteria are locked. You compete on price, risk, or familiarity
Competitive field	You alone	2-3 vendors evaluated	Full RFP field
<b>Influence decreases as time passes</b> 			

**Evolution Partner (Engage within the first 30 days).** The buyer is processing what the change means. No requirements exist yet. The supplier who shows up now gets invited in as a thinking partner, helping the buyer understand implications and priorities. SBI's Headway Selling research calls this advancing customer evolution: helping the buyer make progress on their change is what earns partner status, not just arriving early.

You know you're an Evolution Partner when the buyer asks your opinion on what to prioritize rather than whether you can meet their requirements.

**Preferred Contender (Days 30-90).** The buyer is translating the change into defined needs, building requirements, and shortlisting suppliers. You can still influence evaluation criteria, but you're being compared, not consulted.

You know you're a Preferred Contender when conversations shift from "what should we do?" to "can you do this?"

**Commodity Bidder (Days 90+).** Requirements are locked and the RFP is out. Everyone answers the same questions on the same timeline. The buyer picks on price, risk, or familiarity.

You know you're a Commodity Bidder when your first interaction is a procurement email with a two-week response deadline.

These are three different realities determined by a single variable: when your team recognized the business evolution event.

## From signal intelligence to Headway Selling

A GTM team that shows up in week one and pitches product is still a vendor. The buyer's perception of you as a partner, contender, or commodity bidder isn't just about timing. It's about what you do with the time you have. SBI's research with nearly 600 buyers is direct on this: teams that convert early access into Evolution Partner status focus on the customer's change and how to navigate it, not their own solution's capabilities or value. SBI calls this Headway Selling (see: [The Next Era of Commercial Differentiation](#)). The commercial impact is measurable. GTM teams practicing Headway Selling see an average increase in their win rate of 33.5%.

Headway Selling was built for today's buying environment, where constant business evolution creates uncertainty, buying committees are working through implications before requirements are defined, and decisions stall when buyers lose confidence in their own direction. It produces larger deals and faster decisions by building buyer confidence that the GTM team will help them succeed as conditions change.

Signal intelligence creates the opening. The three principles of Headway Selling convert it into revenue.

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### **Advance customer evolution.**

Signal intelligence gets you in the room during days 0-30, when the buyer is still working out what a business evolution event means for their organization. Headway Selling tells you what to do with that access: show the customer how the change reshapes their business and connect your differentiation to where they're headed. Advance their thinking instead of pitching the product. That's what separates the Evolution Partner from a well-timed vendor call.

### **Anticipate roadblocks.**

Monitoring signals across accounts reveals patterns most buyers haven't seen before they hit them. Companies navigating simultaneous restructuring and technology migration see procurement timelines double, budget cycles shift, and executive turnover stall decisions that had momentum. Tell buyers what's coming before they experience it and you build trust that carries through the full sales cycle.

### **Align the team to customer direction.**

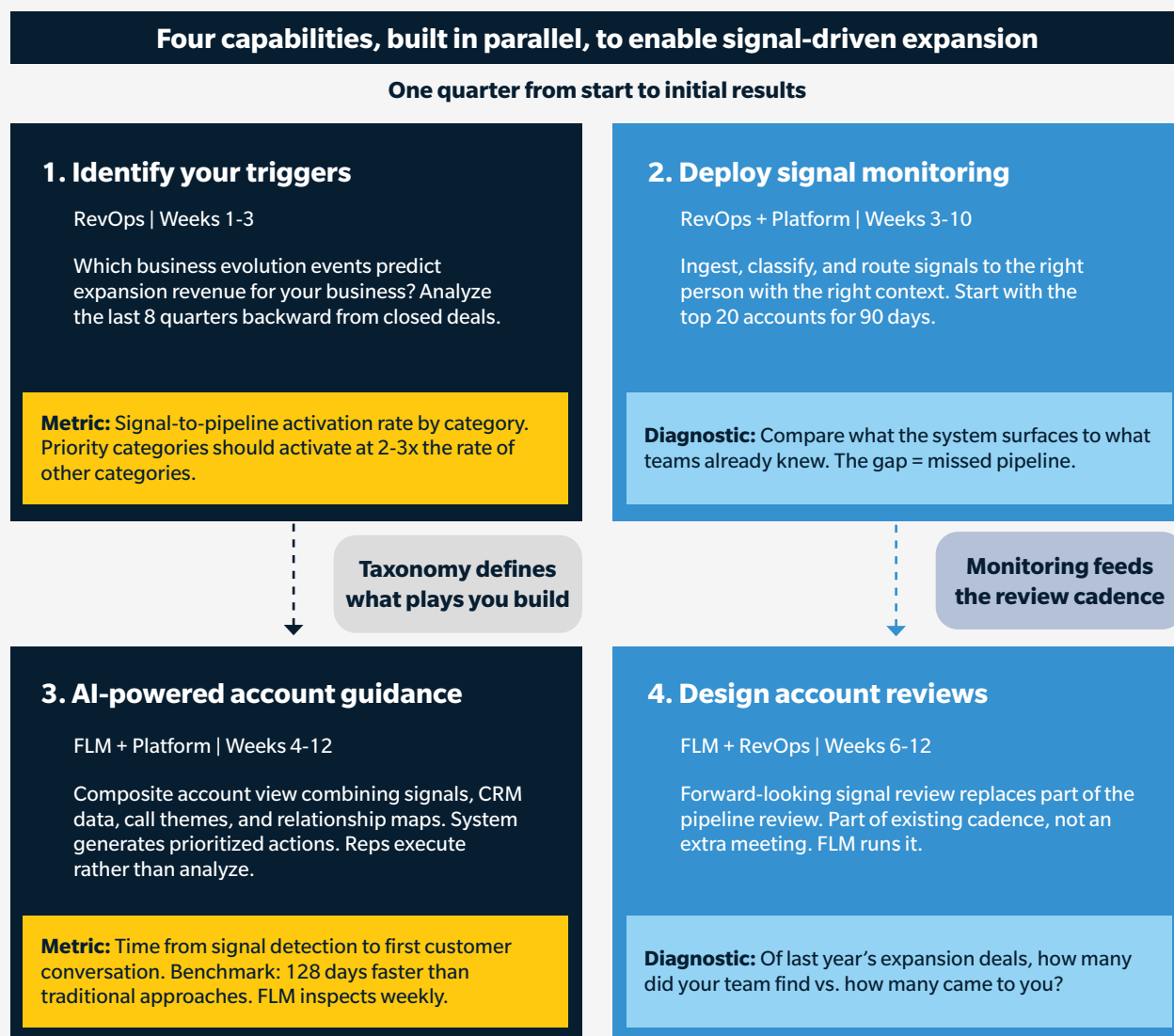
Deeper account penetration doesn't happen through individual relationships. It requires coordinated effort across sales, customer success, solution engineering, and executive sponsors, all oriented around the same customer objective. When multiple buying centers are engaged around a single strategic direction, deals get larger and close faster.

Headway Selling depends on detection happening across the account team, not just the AE. Customer Success teams often detect these signals first through relationship context: a CSM hears about a restructuring in a quarterly review, a support engineer notices activity from a new department. CS tells you whether the relationship supports pursuing it.

Signal intelligence tells you when and where the opportunity is forming. Headway Selling determines what you do once you're there. Teams that build both capabilities convert early access into Evolution Partner status consistently, not occasionally.

## Building signal-driven expansion in one quarter

The shift to signal-driven expansion doesn't require replacing your GTM infrastructure. It requires adding a layer of visibility your teams don't currently have, then building the discipline to act on what it reveals. The full buildout takes one quarter from start to initial results.



### **Step 1: Figure out which signals matter for your business (weeks 1-3)**

Before investing in any technology, answer one question: what changed in your customer's business before your last 10 expansion wins?

Have your RevOps team analyze closed expansion deals from the last eight quarters and map each one backward to the business event that created the need. The patterns will concentrate. In this study, three categories drove 82% of closed deals. Your concentration will differ based on your market, but the principle holds: a small number of business evolution types predict the majority of your expansion revenue. That analysis becomes your signal investment thesis and determines where you focus monitoring resources.

This step matters because it prevents the most common failure mode: monitoring everything and acting on nothing. Without a thesis, signal platforms generate noise. With one, every dollar spent on monitoring is directed at the signal categories with the highest historical conversion to revenue. The metric to track: signal-to-pipeline activation rate by category. After 90 days of monitoring, you should see your priority categories activating into qualified pipeline at 2-3x the rate of the categories you deprioritized. If the rates are flat across categories, your thesis is wrong and needs revision.

### **Step 2: Build the system that tracks and routes them (weeks 3-10)**

Unlike intent data, which tells you who is already shopping, business evolution monitoring tells you who is about to need something they haven't started looking for. No account team can manually track thousands of business evolution events across dozens of accounts. You need a platform that ingests public data, sorts signals by type and urgency, and sends them to the right person. The specific technology matters less than the design: what counts as a real signal versus noise, and who gets it. A signal that reaches the wrong person, or the right person without context, is wasted.

Start with your top 20 accounts. Run the monitoring for 90 days. Compare what the system finds to what your account teams already knew. The size of that gap tells you how much pipeline your teams are missing.

### **Step 3: Equip your teams to act on what the system surfaces (weeks 4-12, parallel with Step 2)**

Signal intelligence is only as good as what reaches the seller and how clearly it's presented. The best implementations don't hand reps a feed of raw alerts to interpret. They combine business evolution signals, CRM history, recorded call themes, relationship maps, and external activity into a single account view that shows what's changing and why it matters. The seller opens an account and sees the full picture: which contacts are engaged, what signals have fired, what internal activity has happened, and where the risks and opportunities sit. They generate prioritized actions, not from their own analysis, but from the system scanning across all of that data and recommending where to focus today.

That changes the frontline manager's job. Coaching shifts from "how do you read these signals?" to "the system told you this account has a leadership change, a platform migration, and a stalled renewal in three different buying centers. What's your plan for the week?" Build plays for each of your priority signal types. Each play answers three questions:

1. What does the first conversation focus on? Help the buyer think through what the change means for their business. Don't qualify a deal.
2. Who else in the account is affected? Map the event across the organization, not just the contact you know.
3. Who on our team engages? AE, CSM, and executive sponsor align on what they know and who has the strongest path in before anyone reaches out.

The metric to track: time from signal detection to first customer conversation. Signal-driven teams in this study engaged 128 days faster than traditional approaches. If your teams are receiving signals and sitting on them for weeks, you have a coaching problem, not a data problem. The FLM inspects this weekly.

#### **Step 4: Change how you run your accounts (weeks 6-12, parallel with Step 3)**

QBRs look backward. Pipeline reviews cover deals already in play. Neither one surfaces changes happening inside customer organizations that haven't turned into defined needs yet. Add a forward-looking signal review to your existing meeting cadence. This replaces part of the pipeline review, not an extra meeting. The FLM runs it. Without this, signals pile up in a dashboard and nothing changes.

Then look at last year's expansion results. Of the deals your team closed, how many did they find because they saw a need forming, and how many came through an inbound request or an RFP? If most came to you, the pipeline was in plain sight. Your teams just didn't have a system to see it.

#### **Why SBI?**

Driven by insights and delivered from experience, SBI continues to help clients grow their revenue, margin, and enterprise value in ways never before possible.

Working with us, go-to-market leaders can expect confidence and trust with experienced partners every step of the way. We engage and support our clients as an extension of their team, both guiding and working side-by-side to deliver relatable, practical strategies that work for today and tomorrow.

Connect with SBI today and talk to us about how we can help you on your growth journey.

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#### **About Polaris I/O**

Polaris I/O is an enterprise account platform that modernizes account research, planning, and execution. Polaris I/O applies external data and AI-driven intelligence to continuously monitor the relevant needs of enterprise accounts for growth and expansion. With a focus on pre-intent signals, the Polaris I/O platform proactively alerts account sellers to relevant customer problems and challenges, which solutions align to address those challenges, who is involved in the decision-making process, and which value propositions match each stakeholder. Polaris I/O monitors commercial signals across accounts, markets, industries, and suppliers to proactively inform commercial teams of immediate areas of risk and opportunity.



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