PASTBEHAVIOR RESEARCH

# Moving Into a Bigger Budget

What happened when 13 B2B software companies tried

Historical evidence on what happens when software companies move from constrained functional buyers toward larger strategic budgets, senior executives, and broader categories.

Functional buyers have constrained budgets. The customer marketing manager, the enablement lead, the developer advocate, the community manager. Competent people who understand the product, want to buy it, and do not control a budget line of their own.

So software companies move upward. Toward the CRO, the CISO, the CFO. Toward a larger category, a more strategic outcome, a budget that is not discretionary.

It sounds obviously correct. We went back and looked at what happened when companies actually did it.

13 CASES · 4 TYPES OF MIGRATION · HISTORICAL EVIDENCE THROUGH 2026

EXECUTIVE FINDING

## Moving into a larger budget is not the same as improving the economics or durability of the business.

Across the cases, four moves that look similar from outside produced very different outcomes:

01 Consequence expansion — more people benefit while the same person buys.

02 Scope expansion — more functions are served without evidence that the economic buyer changes.

03 Vocabulary adoption — the language spreads but no durable market boundary forms.

04 Budget migration — the buyer and budget genuinely move.

The relevant question is not:

**Can we reach a bigger budget?**

It is:

**Does reaching it improve the economics and durability of our position?**

01 / THE PATTERN

## Four things that look like moving upmarket

01

### Consequence expansion

More people benefit. The same person buys.

UserEvidence stayed in customer advocacy while the consequences of its product expanded into sales, demand generation, product marketing, enablement, and leadership.

02

### Scope expansion

More workflows. Same buyer.

Gartner renamed Sales Enablement Platforms to Revenue Enablement Platforms as vendors broadened the functions they served.

Customer success, marketing, presales, and partners entered the definition.

Its 2026 event targets Director-plus titles in customer marketing, product marketing, and marketing leadership. Not RevOps. Not the CRO.

LESSON

Expanding organizational value does not always require changing the approval chain.

Public evidence does not establish that the economic buyer or budget owner changed.

LESSON

Broader product scope should not be mistaken for budget migration.

03

### Vocabulary adoption

The language spreads. The market may not.

Product-Led Sales became widely used across founders, media, communities, and vendor roundups.

Roughly $118M funded six companies around the idea.

No durable analyst boundary or stable market membership formed.

LESSON

Vocabulary adoption is not the same as market structure formation.

04

### Genuine budget migration

Different buyer. Different budget.

Snyk moved from developer-first adoption into enterprise application-security spending.

The migration was real.

The destination also contained mature incumbents and consolidating economics.

LESSON

A larger budget can still produce a worse competitive position.

02 / WHAT HISTORY SHOWS

## The cases

Ten representative cases are shown below. Three additional cases informed the pattern analysis and methodology.
Expand any row for the underlying detail, caveats, and citations.

| COMPANY / PATTERN | STARTING POSITION | MOVE | WHAT HAPPENED | WHAT IT TEACHES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pocus**<br>FACT | Product-Led Sales platform | Carve a named subcategory inside sales | Raised $23M; shifted to Revenue Data Platform within ten months of the round; acquired by Apollo.io in March 2026 and described as revenue intelligence<br><br>Pocus promoted Product-Led Sales using a benchmark report with First Round Capital, a 1,300-member community inside twelve months, two playbook volumes, sustained founder content, and $23M from Coatue, a16z, and Khosla.<br><br>In April 2023 the company launched its Revenue Data Platform. By 2025 its positioning had moved toward AI sales intelligence.<br><br>Apollo.io acquired Pocus in March 2026 and described it as an enterprise-grade revenue intelligence platform. Product-Led Sales did not appear in the acquisition announcement. | Language can propagate without creating durable market structure |

| COMPANY / PATTERN | STARTING POSITION | MOVE | WHAT HAPPENED | WHAT IT TEACHES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Product-Led Sales cohort**<br>FACT | Six venture-funded companies around a named subcategory | Attempted market creation around Product-Led Sales | ~$118M funded; Calixa closed; Pocus and HeadsUp acquired; surviving companies changed terminology<br>Contemporaneous coverage grouped Calixa, Correlated, HeadsUp, Endgame, Pocus, and Toplyne together.<br>Gartner Peer Insights today uses Product-Led Revenue Applications rather than Product-Led Sales.<br>TechCrunch reported in March 2023 that companies in the cohort were already distancing themselves from the category language.<br>Toplyne outcome remains unresolved. | A phrase can survive after the market around it fails to form |
| **Highspot**<br>FACT / INFERENCE | Sales Enablement | Revenue Enablement scope expansion | Gartner renamed the category in 2022; Highspot became an MQ Leader in November 2025; signed agreement to merge with Seismic in February 2026<br>Gartner's own description of the rename said vendors were already repositioning around broader revenue functions.<br>The new category broadened the roles being enabled.<br>No public evidence was located proving that the budget owner or economic buyer changed.<br>No claim is made that the Gartner rename caused the merger. | Analyst legitimacy is not the same as structural defensibility |
| **Snyk**<br>FACT / INFERENCE | Developer-first security tooling | True migration into enterprise AppSec | Buyer and budget moved; peak valuation $8.5B; BlackRock later marked the company at $3.7B; a sub-$3B PE bid was reportedly rejected<br>Snyk successfully converted developer adoption into enterprise application-security spend.<br>The destination market included Checkmarx, Veracode, Black Duck, and other established security vendors.<br>Valuation evidence rests on the BlackRock $3.7B mark and the reportedly rejected sub-$3B PE offer. Weaker secondary-market estimates were excluded.<br>Snyk's current corporate status remains unresolved and is disclosed in Method, evidence, and limits. | A bigger budget can place a company inside economics established by larger incumbents |

| COMPANY / PATTERN | STARTING POSITION | MOVE | WHAT HAPPENED | WHAT IT TEACHES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Okta**<br>FACT / INFERENCE | Identity administration / developer identity | Partial migration / straddle across CIO and CISO | Independent public company at roughly $2.9B annual revenue<br>Okta's president and COO described two GTM personas: an enterprise buyer, primarily CIOs and CISOs, and a developer buyer.<br>Okta's own collateral says identity represents less than 9% of average security budgets.<br>Its structural position is identity infrastructure beneath the stack, combined with explicitly marketed neutrality. | Durability came from becoming infrastructure, not merely from reaching a more senior buyer |
| **Common Room**<br>FACT | Community software | Repositioned into GTM intelligence for revenue teams | Acquired by Zoom in July 2026<br>Zoom bought Common Room as an extension of Zoom Revenue Accelerator.<br>Zoom's chief strategy officer described the transaction as extending Zoom's system of action upstream. | A successful migration and a durable independent position are separate outcomes |
| **UserEvidence**<br>FACT / INFERENCE | Customer advocacy / customer evidence | Expanded consequence without changing organizational home | Stayed in marketing; raised $7M and acquired Zealot in August 2025<br>UserEvidence's 2026 event targets Director-plus customer marketing, product marketing, and marketing leadership.<br>The product's consequences extend into sales, demand generation, product marketing, enablement, and leadership.<br>It also built an original research franchise, owned event, named problem, and blind-but-verified evidence model.<br>An estimated ~$7M ARR circulates as a secondary figure and is treated as secondary, not as a primary fact. | Expand the number of people who benefit without expanding the number who approve |
| **Bombora**<br>FACT / INFERENCE | Intent-data layer | Stayed across competing systems of action | Independent for roughly twelve years<br>Bombora operates a cooperative across 200+ publishers and 5,500+ B2B media sites.<br>86% of the data reportedly flows exclusively to Bombora.<br>Its signals feed 100+ partner platforms. | Neutrality matters when it is required for the asset to exist |

| COMPANY / PATTERN | STARTING POSITION | MOVE | WHAT HAPPENED | WHAT IT TEACHES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Crossbeam**<br>FACT | Partner ecosystem / account mapping | Built a cross-company network | Independent; merged horizontally with Reveal<br>30,000+ companies connect CRM data for account mapping.<br>Bob Moore has publicly likened the network structure to LinkedIn: the asset is the connections between companies, not any single participant. | Cross-company assets can resist vertical absorption because platform ownership would weaken the network |
| **LeanData**<br>FACT / INFERENCE | Salesforce-native routing | Embedded deeper inside the platform rather than becoming neutral | Independent for roughly fourteen years<br>LeanData supports Salesforce rather than multiple CRMs.<br>Its durability appears to come from accumulated customer logic: routing rules, territories, account hierarchies, and audit trails. | Customer-specific configuration can be more durable than proprietary technology |

03 / THE CATEGORY CARVE

## The language moved. The market didn't.

| WHAT THE CATEGORY-BUILDING PLAYBOOK LOOKED LIKE | WHAT DID NOT HAPPEN |
|---|---|
| Name Product-Led Sales | No stable analyst boundary |
| Fund multiple vendors | No durable vendor membership |
| Publish original research | No independent budget |
| Build community | Surviving vendors changed terminology |
| Create playbooks | Category creator abandoned its own label |
| Earn media adoption | Acquirers described assets using broader existing categories |
| Phrase survives | |

> **A named subcategory can achieve vocabulary adoption without becoming a durable market.**

04 / THE DURABILITY MECHANISMS

## What actually protected companies

01

### Across companies

The asset spans parties who would not all contribute to a platform.

CASES
Bombora, Crossbeam

02

### Inside the platform

Customers have encoded operating logic they cannot cheaply rebuild.

CASES
LeanData, Okta

KEY QUESTION

Would the asset still work if one platform owned it?

KEY QUESTION

Is the value the capability, or the customer's accumulated configuration?

03

### Beside the platform

The function depends on an interested party not controlling it.

CASES

UserEvidence

KEY QUESTION

Would platform ownership destroy the credibility of the function?

04

### Upstream and recreatable

The layer tells the system of action who to engage and why now, using data the platform can economically recreate.

CASES

Pocus, Common Room, Calixa, HeadsUp

KEY QUESTION

Can the platform absorb this capability without destroying its value? If yes, exposure is high.

05 / TWO THINGS THE EVIDENCE CORRECTED

## What did not hold up

### Neutrality is neither necessary nor sufficient

Bombora and Crossbeam integrate broadly and remain durable.

LeanData has essentially no platform neutrality and remains durable.

Neutrality matters only when it is constitutive: when the asset stops working if a platform owns it.

### Technical difficulty protects almost nothing

Across the observed cases, the relevant capabilities were technically reproducible. Durability came from economic or organizational barriers:

> network participation
> neutrality required for contribution
> accumulated configuration
> independent attestation
> organizational switching cost

Large engineering effort is not the same as structural protection.

06 / THE LAYER DURABILITY TEST

## Before moving toward a larger platform or budget, ask nine questions

1 **Where does the company sit?**

Upstream, inside, across, or beside?

2 **Can the platform technically recreate the capability?**

Answer it, then avoid treating this as the moat without evidence.

3 **Can the platform economically recreate it?**

Would recreation destroy or weaken the value?

4 **Is neutrality constitutive?**

Does the asset stop working if a platform owns it?

5 **Does value compound across companies or platforms?**

Does another participant improve the product for existing participants?

6 **Is there accumulated customer-specific configuration?**

What has the customer built that cannot be shipped generically?

7 **Does the layer own an independent budget?**

Useful for pricing power, weaker as a durability predictor.

8 **Can the platform acquire the layer without destroying its value?**

The fastest inverse test.

9 **Is the system of action moving toward this position?**

Look at roadmap language, acquisitions, product expansion, and category claims.

> **A layer can become exposed without changing anything if the platform above decides to move toward it.**

07 / THE BUDGET MIGRATION DIAGNOSTIC

## Four routes companies should distinguish

| | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Route | **Expand economic consequence without moving the buyer** | **Attach to the larger ecosystem** | **Carve a subcategory** | **Influence the taxonomy** |
| Description | More organizational consequence. Same approval path. | Become an input to platforms already owning the larger budget. | Create a named market inside an existing one. | Build enough vendor and customer evidence and consensus that analysts, platforms, or the market begin to broaden the category. |
| COST | Low | Medium | High | High |
| PRIMARY RISK | Ceiling | Upstream absorption if economically recreatable | Vocabulary without market structure | Legitimacy without defensibility |

**Cost to access and defensibility after arrival are different variables. Do not combine them into one score.**

08 / THE COUNTERINTUITIVE FINDING

# The better move may be to keep the buyer

Most upmarket strategies begin with the budget:

Who controls more money?

The historical cases suggest beginning somewhere else:

### Can we make the existing buyer responsible for a larger economic consequence?

Then work backward:

> Who already benefits from the product?
>
> Which downstream outcomes can be measured?
>
> Can Sales, Finance, Security, Operations, or leadership become beneficiaries without becoming approvers?
>
> Can ACV rise without introducing a new procurement motion?
>
> Can the existing buyer carry stronger internal proof?

Moving to a larger budget usually introduces a new buyer, new proof requirements, new competitors, and a new procurement path.

Sometimes that cost is justified.

Sometimes the better move is:

**Expand the number of people who benefit without expanding the number of people who have to approve the purchase.**

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09 / FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION

## Before changing category or buyer, map the move

### 01 Establish the real buyer

Identify who actually moves the purchase forward.

- user
- champion
- signer
- budget owner
- procurement path

OUTPUT

The current economic buying system, not the personas named on the website.

### 02 Diagnose what is actually changing

Determine which move is genuinely being proposed.

- consequence expansion
- scope expansion
- vocabulary adoption
- true budget migration
- system-of-action attachment

OUTPUT

A precise classification of the strategic move.

### 03 Test durability

Apply the nine-question Layer Durability Test.

- position
- recreatability
- neutrality
- compounding
- configuration

OUTPUT

The likely structural position after the move.

### 04 Compare historical routes

Use closest structural comparables, not simply famous category creators.

- same layer
- same buyer
- same platform pressure

same time horizon

OUTPUT

What happened to companies facing the same decision.

## 05 Decide the route

Compare the routes on the variables that actually differ.

- cost
- buyer friction
- time
- economic upside
- defensibility
- plausible terminal state
- what would falsify the conclusion

OUTPUT

An evidence-backed route rather than generic “move upmarket” advice.

**Research identifies what happened.**
**Strategy determines whether the conditions transfer.**
**Execution builds the route.**

10 / THE RULE

# Don’t ask whether there is a bigger budget. Ask whether moving into it leaves you in a better position.

A larger market can contain worse economics.

A more senior buyer can create a harder approval path.

A new category can create vocabulary without creating demand.

The useful question is whether the move improves both the economic value of the product and the durability of the position it occupies.

### Method, evidence, and limits

CASE SET

Thirteen B2B software companies concentrated in go-to-market software, including category creation, buyer migration, signal layers, intent data, partner networks, identity, application security, and customer advocacy. Ten are displayed above.

EVIDENCE WEIGHTING

Company announcements, SEC filings, analyst research, acquisition announcements, founder interviews, contemporaneous trade reporting, archived positioning, and customer evidence. Company positioning language alone was not treated as evidence that the buyer or budget changed.

EVIDENCE LABELS

FACT — directly supported by a dated source. INFERENCE — a conclusion supported by multiple facts. UNKNOWN — evidence unavailable or conflicting.

DOMAIN LIMITATION

The method is intended to generalize. The current evidence base does not. These are GTM-software patterns and analogies, not universal base rates. If applied to another domain, a domain-specific historical cohort should be constructed.

SELECTION CAVEAT

Acquisitions produce press releases and quiet independence does not. The public evidence therefore over-represents absorption. Independence is not automatically success. Acquisition is not automatically failure.

UNRESOLVED EVIDENCE

Toplyne's outcome remains unresolved. HeadsUp → Hightouch currently rests on a LinkedIn page naming the acquisition and should be independently verified before presenting it as fully confirmed. Snyk's current corporate status has conflicting secondary reporting.

CITATIONS

Sources are named inside each case row. Where the underlying research did not record a URL, none is shown rather than reconstructed.

## What does past behavior say about your next move?

The useful part of precedent isn't knowing what happened. It's identifying which conditions made it work, whether those conditions exist in your business, and what changes if you choose the same route.

If you're deciding whether to change buyer, category, distribution, or market position, we can map the historical cases against your situation.

TALK THROUGH A DECISION