

When AI Guides, Who Decides?

By Jacco J. van der Kooij | Founder/CEO Winning by Design | March 13, 2025

We are experiencing a fundamental shift in GTM, not just because of AI, but because Inbound and Outbound no longer deliver the growth needed.

The future will be shaped at a high level by three core engagement models: Product-Led Growth (PLG), Human-Led Growth (HLG), and AI-Led Growth (AILG). More importantly, buyers will not pick just one; they will move seamlessly between these models, deciding how and when they engage—whether through making a self-service call (PLG), being educated through AI-powered insights (AILG), or an in-person whiteboard meeting (HLG) for expert help.

**The companies that win won't be the ones that sell better—
they will be the ones that make buying better.**

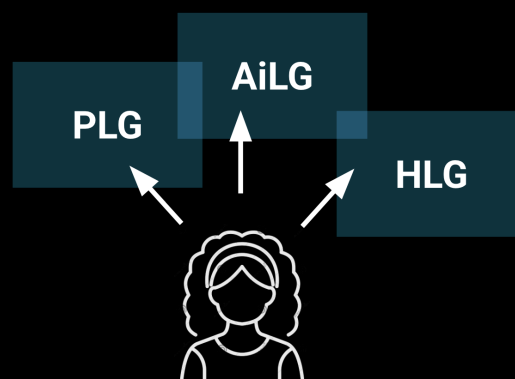


Figure 1. Don't think of PLG, HLG, and AILG as a seller-driven approach—but rather as a buyer-driven approach.

This shift raises an important question: Where does product differentiation fit in? The reality is that products increasingly look alike—they are built on the same AI, offer the same features, and operate on the same device. Yes, brand loyalty is fading. We now switch between products faster than ever—Lyft to Uber, Prime to Netflix—choosing based on what we want and how quickly we can get it, not commitment.

**In this new reality, how people buy—not just what they buy—
will become the ultimate differentiator.**

1. People don't buy products. They buy impact.

You don't get into an Uber because you want the company; you get in because you need to get somewhere. Yet for decades, sales and marketing have focused on "selling value," using "value proposals" and "value-based sales methods." But value is just a promise of impact. What people truly pay for is not the promise—it's the realization of that promise, the actual impact.

No one buys a tool for its features; they buy it for the outcomes it delivers.

For decades, sales and marketing have focused on selling value—but value is just a promise of impact. What people actually pay for is the realization of impact. No one buys a SaaS tool because of its features; they buy it because of the results it delivers.

2. Recurring Revenue is the result of Recurring Impact.

If your product does not deliver impact, and equally important, if the impact is not sustained, neither will your revenue. In fact, you are building on quicksand. The companies that succeed will not only consistently deliver impact, but their customers will recognize it and want more of it. As a result, they will see renewals, expansions, and referrals. Those that fail? Churn will expose them. This is happening right now.

Look at Disney+: fantastic programming, a great app, a trusted brand—yet I canceled my subscription. Why? My kids went to college, and we had seen enough Star Wars to last a lifetime. No more impact, so we stopped renewing.

3. Selling is optional. Delivering impact is not.

In the past, growth was tied to the efficacy of sales teams. We measured win rate per rep, revenue per region, quota performance, and number of reps on target. They were treated as if they were the key to growth. Every year, as sales leaders, we spend months refining quotas, drawing up comp plans, and making territory plans. We hold Sales Kickoffs and go to President's Clubs, but none of this makes the impact our customers get out of our products much better.

**The future of growth is tied to how well a company delivers impact—
long before a contract is signed.**

What if, instead of pouring resources into optimizing sales efficiency, we focused on ensuring customers experience the right impact? If your growth has slowed, don't blame the market, don't blame the sales team—ask yourself: How focused are you on delivering impact?

It's simple, really: The need for "selling" diminishes when the impact is obvious. The best companies won't have to convince buyers—they'll simply deliver impact.

4. AI won't just make selling better—it will make buying effortless.

The role of AI in GTM isn't just to automate sales—it's to remove friction from buying. Think of three dimensions of a factory:

- Higher Volume – Producing more, measured in growth rate.
- Lower Cost – Doing it more efficiently, measured in GTM efficiency.
- Better Quality – Delivering greater impact, measured in GRR/NRR.

Today, we primarily think of AI as a tool for reducing costs and increasing volume. But AI offers so much more. It will unlock entirely new dimensions of the buying experience—ones we haven't even imagined yet. It's like trying to picture Uber Eats before Uber existed. The companies that embrace AI beyond automation and into impact creation will define the future of buying.

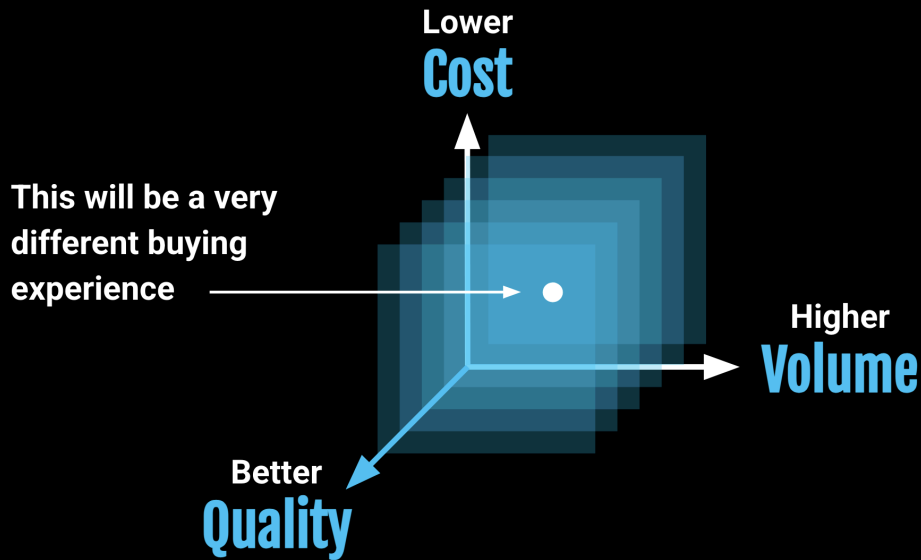


Figure 2. AI-driven GTM will redefine the buying experience—reducing costs, increasing volume, and improving quality (for the buyer!) all at once.

5. Buyers don't want a process. They want to have already bought.

No one wakes up thinking, I want to go through a sales cycle today. Buyers don't want discovery calls, proposals, or negotiations. They want to be confident they made the right choice.

Think about how we make personal purchases. When you book a flight, you don't want to negotiate with an airline rep for a week—you just want to pick the best flight, pay, and move on. Amazon's "Buy Now" button isn't just a feature; it reflects buyer psychology—the best buying process is no process at all. This shift is already happening.

Companies that eliminate friction and give buyers instant confidence in their decisions will dominate.

AI will play a key role in making this possible—analyzing needs, presenting the right options, and guiding buyers to impact without unnecessary steps.

6. Speed wins. Clarity wins. Effortless wins.

Stop thinking of GTM as a way to manage people through a “funnel”—it’s a system that describes the journey where buyers signal their interest, and they are in control of the road they want to take. The best buying experience is one that requires the least effort from the buyer. If you can deliver speed, clarity, and impact with minimal friction, you win. It’s. That. Simple.

The best companies won’t convince you—they won’t have to.

Think of AI not as a tool to target buyers but as a way to guide them toward impact. And, if impact is self-evident, why do we need sales persuasion techniques? AI-first companies will create a journey of customer-friendly experiences where customers make decisions naturally—without feeling they are being sold.

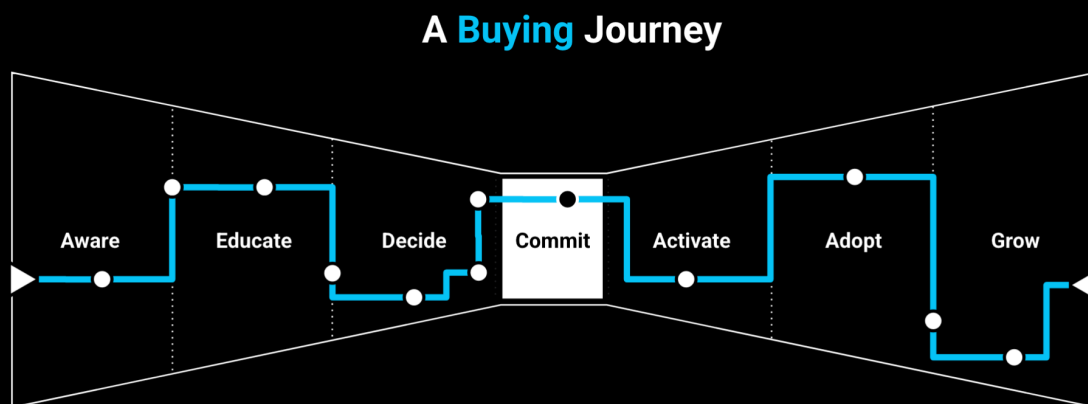


Figure 3. The buying journey is not just about different words; it is about a different perspective.

Humans slow things down. AI organizations operate faster—and in today’s market, speed is everything. Windows of opportunity open and close faster than ever. They are smaller, more dynamic, and require instant action. Human-led teams simply cannot respond quick enough.

Speed isn’t just an advantage—it’s a necessity.

But speed is hard to explain—you have to feel it. Looking back a few years from now, we will realize just how slow we are operating today. AI-driven GTM will feel as transformative as the internet itself—what once seemed fast will soon feel unbearably slow. The companies that embrace speed, automation, and frictionless decision-making will be the ones that dominate. The question isn't whether AI will accelerate GTM—it's whether you'll be fast enough to keep up.

7. In the AI era, buyers don't search. They arrive.

For decades, GTM has been about getting found—Inbound, Outbound—but that's changing. In the AI-driven future, buyers won't search for solutions; they will simply be led to the right one. Seamlessly. Instantly. They arrive.

That doesn't mean Inbound and outbound are dead. They're evolving. Let me explain: Friction in buying slows growth more than we realize. Questions are left unanswered in the discovery call. Follow-up is delayed. The seller misunderstands the buyer's needs, as they only hear what is important to the selling process. Companies that remove that friction—from discovery to impact—will dominate.

AI-first GTM won't just capture demand; it will orchestrate it long before the buyer knows they need it.

And the best part? AI will enable more humans to connect. Yes, it will make human connections more important than ever; in fact, it will put it on steroids! How? We often miss details—not realizing we grew up in the same city, attended the same college, or worked at the same company—AI keeping an eye out allows us to connect with familiar faces.

Okay, but let's get real: I don't think that AI will recommend the best sales team; it will recommend the best solution for that specific customer. Therefore, the more reliably a company delivers impact, the more AI will prioritize it in buyer decision-making.

This tells you that the next generation of winners will be the ones AI trusts to deliver impact. Think about it this way: people don't think about breathing—they just do it. The best GTM will make buying feel just as natural and effortless.

8. Don't focus on what AI will change; focus on what won't change.

We are too focused on all the things AI is changing. But let's step back. Instead of obsessing over what AI disrupts, we should focus on what will **never** change. Here are four things that will always be true:

1. Growth will always be important. And in our world, that means exponential growth.
2. Exponential growth is impossible without happy customers.
3. Happy customers come from delivering the impact you promised.
4. Delivering impact repeatedly requires proven processes, efficient systems, and skillful people.

Over time, we have seen how GTM has evolved—every major transformation in sales and marketing has followed the same pattern:

- A new process emerges.
- It gets embedded into systems for efficiency.
- Then, people use those systems to scale.

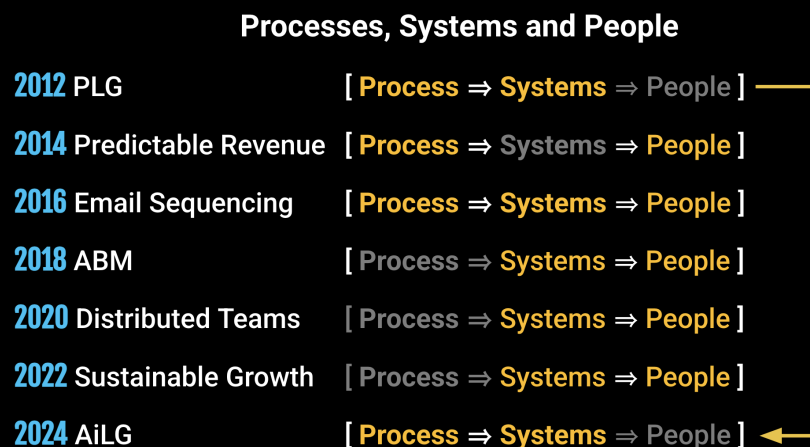


Figure 4. Every GTM innovation—PLG, Email Sequencing, ABM—has followed the same trajectory: it started as a process, became embedded into systems, and then was scaled by people. AiLG is no different.

Now, in 2025, we have AiLG, which, in many ways, operates like PLG did earlier. The reason PLG enabled companies to grow exponentially was that it relied on systems and processes—while most other GTM motions still required human intervention. We’ve learned that human-based growth is linear while systems-based growth scales exponentially.

Historically, the only way to make a human-driven system scale exponentially was by hiring exponentially more people—which came at a high cost. That’s why AiLG has the potential to redefine growth. Unlike human-led GTM, AI-led systems can adapt, learn, and optimize in real time, creating self-sustaining growth loops.

The future of GTM isn’t about replacing humans—it’s about unlocking exponential growth by designing systems that remove friction, maximize efficiency, and enable people to operate at a higher level.

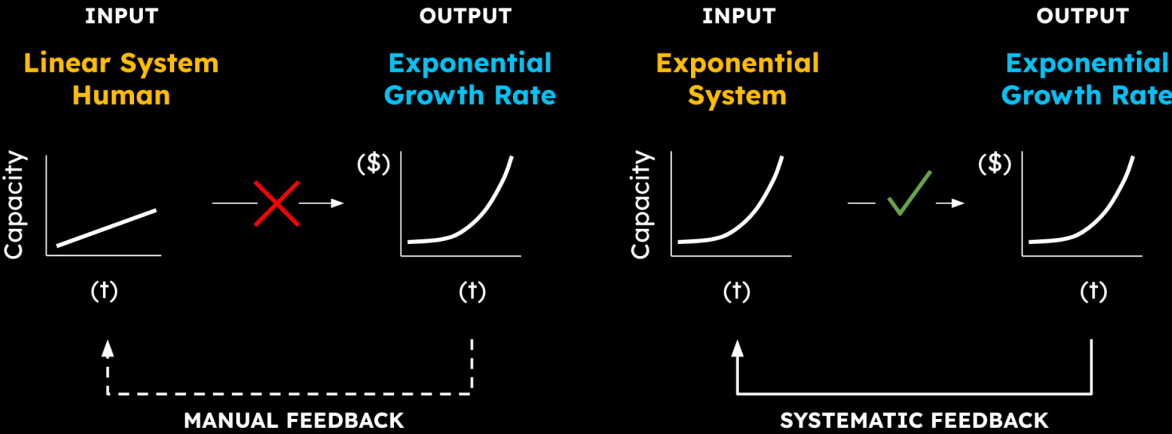


Figure 5. Human-based GTM follows a linear trajectory, requiring constant input (more hires, more outreach) to sustain growth. AI-led systems, on the other hand, introduce systematic feedback loops that enable exponential scalability.

AI isn’t just changing how we sell—it’s redefining how companies scale. The winners of the future will be the ones who understand what AI enables while staying focused on what never changes. Growth. Impact. Happy customers. The humans who designed it and the systems that make it all possible.

9. The Growth Paradigm Shift

Historically, we have always looked at our world through a simple equation:

Growth → *Valuation* → *Funding*... and then to *Customers*

It is time for us to rethink that equation:

Impact → *Happy Customers* → *Growth*... and then *Funding*

The companies that succeed won't just rethink this equation—they will redesign their entire GTM around it. The key here is that Growth will no longer be about how well a company sells—it will be about how well it empowers buyers to engage, in their way, on their terms.

The companies that succeed in the AI era will stop pushing and start removing barriers. You know it yourself because you are a buyer too, and none of us want to be sold to. We all want instant impact.

Companies must adapt to a world where GTM is not a single enforced path by a number of financially motivated humans but rather a flexible, customer-controlled experience. This shift has started in B2C years ago. It has now arrived in B2B.

10. Conclusion

AI isn't just changing how we sell—it's redefining how companies grow. The winners of the future will be the ones who understand what AI enables while staying focused on what never changes. Growth, impact, happy customers, and the systems that make it all possible. What an exciting time!

Want to keep going? Join us at the Impact Summit on May 14 in San Francisco.

<https://winningbydesign.com/impact-summit-2025>

