

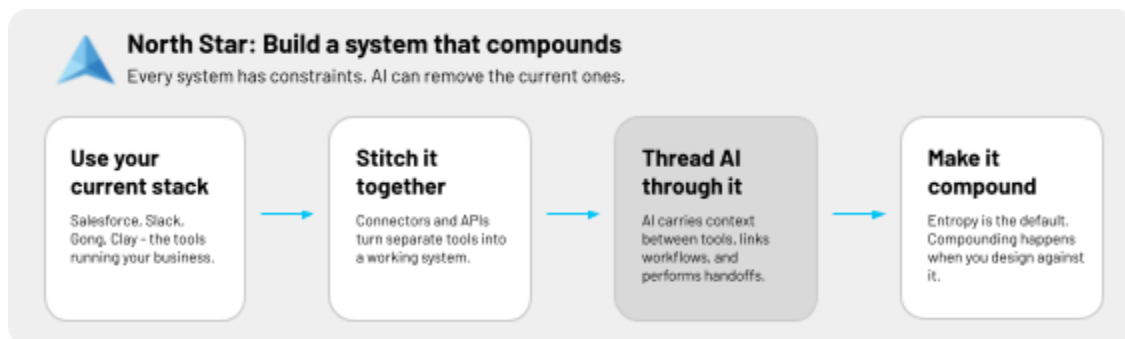
EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Don't Rip And Replace The Stack. Stitch It Together.

The advantage isn't more AI tools. It's how you connect the ones you have.

By Jacco J. van der Kooij, Founder and CEO at Winning by Design

Inside the most advanced companies, a quiet and interesting pattern is emerging. The winners aren't replacing their tools with AI. They start with the stack they already have—Salesforce, Slack, Gong, Clay, the tools running the business—and use AI to stitch it together. Connectors and APIs turn separate tools into a working system. AI is then threaded through it, carrying context between tools, linking workflows, and performing the handoffs that used to fall to people. The payoff is compounding: entropy is the default, so growth only accumulates when you design against it.



The future of GTM isn't tools or AI, people or AI, rip-and-replace or legacy. It's tools and AI, people and AI, and systems redesigned around AI—growth systems that compound.

This is the same arc that played out in manufacturing in the 1980s, in software development in the 2010s, and in supply chain through the 2000s. Each time, the winners combined people, process, and technology into adaptive systems designed for continuous improvement. Each evolution took years to play out. GTM is now in year one. What follows are the 5 strategic shifts that define the evolution of GTM over the next few years.

SHIFT 1. FROM FUNNEL TO BOWTIE

Over the last decade, enterprise GTM stacks were built one layer at a time: CRM, marketing automation, conversational intelligence, and now AI co-pilots. Each layer solved a specific problem. None were designed to operate as one connected system.

The result is a fragmented stack:

- Data sits in disconnected applications.
- Teams work from different definitions.
- AI is layered onto inconsistent workflows.
- Visibility breaks across the customer lifecycle.
- Operational complexity drives up cost.

As adoption accelerates, fragmentation—not tool selection—has become the primary constraint. The challenge isn't picking the right AI tool. It's designing the right AI architecture.

But the deeper problem is what the stack was built to optimize: the funnel ends at the sale. In recurring-revenue businesses, most growth comes after it—through onboarding, retention, and expansion. A funnel can't see that half of the lifecycle. The Bowtie can.

The Opportunity: Build a structured GTM system

- Establish a standardized operating model.
- Align teams around the full customer lifecycle.
- Connect systems, workflows, and functions.

The Action: Replace the funnel with a unified customer journey that spans acquisition and post-sale growth (the Bowtie).

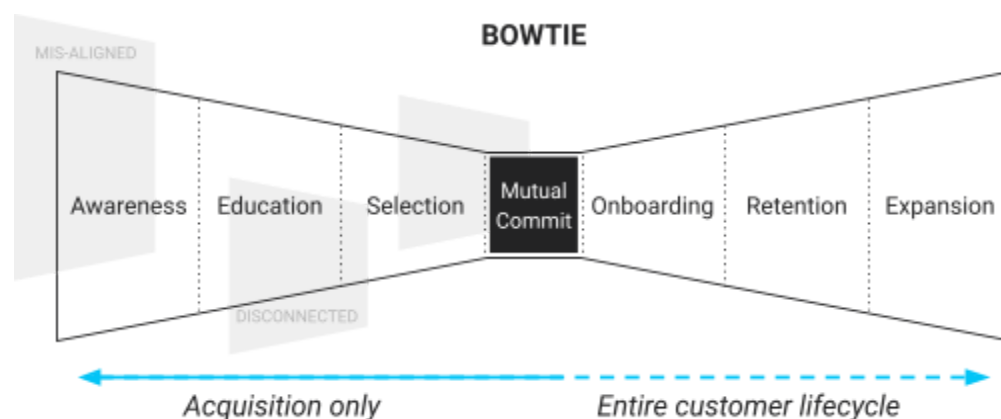


Figure 1. The Bowtie spans the full customer lifecycle. In recurring-revenue businesses, growth is generated after the sale through onboarding, retention, and expansion.

SHIFT 3. DATA REPLACES CRM AS THE CENTER OF GTM

For the last decade, applications defined the GTM stack. The CRM became the operational center as point solutions multiplied around it. The result:

- Customer data is scattered across disconnected systems.
- Different teams defining the customer differently.
- Inconsistent definitions of pain, value, and impact.
- AI is operating on an incomplete or conflicting context.
- Intelligence trapped inside individual applications.

The data shows the depth of the problem. Most customer signal—emails, calls, product usage—lives in separate stores, in incompatible formats, and never flows back. The majority of conversations stay unstructured and unused. AI sitting on top inherits the fragmentation: incomplete inputs, incomplete intelligence.

This is a reversal. For years the CRM was the core of GTM, and every tool built around it. Now it inverts: data is decoupled from the apps that capture it and lives in a central platform the apps draw from. The CRM becomes a consumer of that data, no longer its owner.

So the advantage is no longer the application—it's the quality, structure, and meaning of the data underneath. The CRM becomes an activation layer; the data and semantic layers become the durable source of intelligence. Applications are rented. The data is owned.

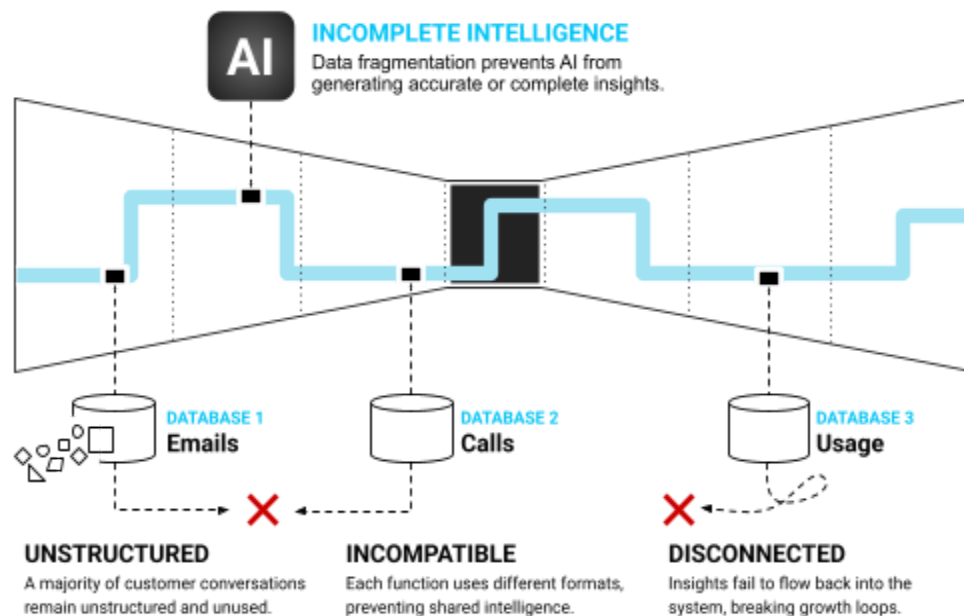


Figure 3. Customer signal stays fragmented across disconnected systems and incompatible formats, leaving AI with incomplete intelligence.

The Opportunity: Create a shared understanding

- A common customer language across teams.
- A standard definition of customer pain, value, and impact.
- Humans and AI are operating from the same context.

The Action: Build a shared operational language—centered on customer pain, impact, and value—that spans the full lifecycle (SPICED as the semantic layer).

SHIFT 4. FROM LINEAR FUNNELS TO GROWTH LOOPS

Traditional GTM was built as a linear funnel, led by people selling to companies. Marketing generated leads, sales converted opportunities, and customer success managed retention. For more than a decade, this people-led model scaled. It has reached its limits: acquisition costs are rising, growth rates are compressing, pipelines are thinning, and retention is softening.

The pattern is well-documented. Benchsight's David Spitz, analyzing 72 public SaaS companies, has shown a clear inversion over the last several years; ICONIQ and Bessemer report parallel trends across their portfolios. The people-led approach no longer scales efficiently.

The fix isn't more funnel. It's loops. A linear funnel spends a dollar to acquire a customer and stops; a loop turns the output of one stage into the input of the next. Advocacy from existing customers feeds acquisition. Community compounds awareness. Expansion feeds itself. Each turn of the system makes the next turn cheaper. AI is what makes loops run at scale—learning from behavior and orchestrating the handoffs continuously, rather than waiting on manual effort. This shifts GTM from a people-led model to a system-led one, increasing both velocity and adaptability.

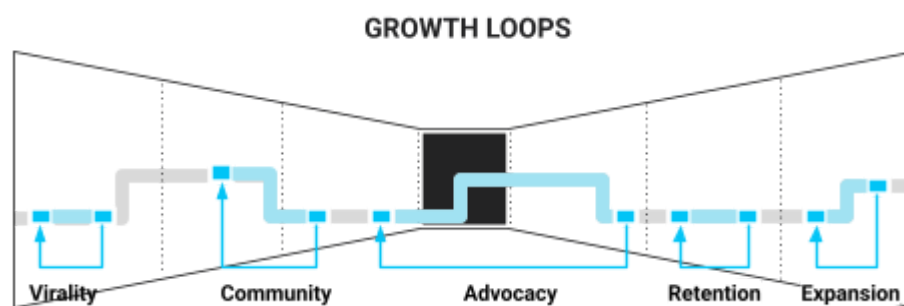


Figure 4. The Bowtie contains multiple growth loops—virality, community, advocacy, retention, expansion—that compound across the lifecycle.

The Opportunity: Create connected growth loops

- Continuously learn from customer behavior.
- Increase execution speed and adaptability.
- Improve acquisition, retention, and expansion at once.

The Action: Move from linear acquisition funnels to compounding growth loops.

SHIFT 5. GTM IS A SYSTEM. DURABLE GROWTH IS THE OUTPUT

For years, GTM was run as a collection of disconnected functions. Marketing, sales, customer success, operations, and technology are each optimized for local outcomes. AI changes that. As the pieces become connected, orchestrated, and intelligence-driven, GTM stops being a set of functions and becomes a single operating system with one output: growth. And growth begins to behave like a system:

- Inputs drive outputs.
- Constraints limit throughput.
- Feedback loops accelerate learning.
- Small improvements compound over time.
- Durable growth follows scientific principles.

This is what the metric stack makes visible. The customer journey at the base generates raw signal—time, volume, conversion, cost, and loop metrics. That signal feeds operating metrics that optimize the engine, rolls up into performance metrics like NRR and LTV, and surfaces as the board metrics that guide investment: Rule of 40, LTV:CAC, Magic Number. Signal flows up; guidance flows down. When the layers connect, a small gain at the base compounds all the way to investor outcomes. When they don't, the board is steering on numbers it can't trace.

The advantage shifts from managing functions to architecting the system that connects them. The CRO becomes a systems architect.

The Opportunity: Like manufacturing, software development, and supply chain before it, GTM is moving from functional execution to systems-based design.

- Design growth around proven scientific principles.
- Continuously optimize through feedback and learning.

The Action: Move from managing disconnected functions to architecting a unified growth system built for scalable, sustainable, durable growth. Revenue Architecture becomes the foundation for designing, operating, teaching, and improving GTM systems rooted in scientific principles. AI doesn't replace that system—it runs inside it, accelerating orchestration, feedback, and decisions across the architecture.

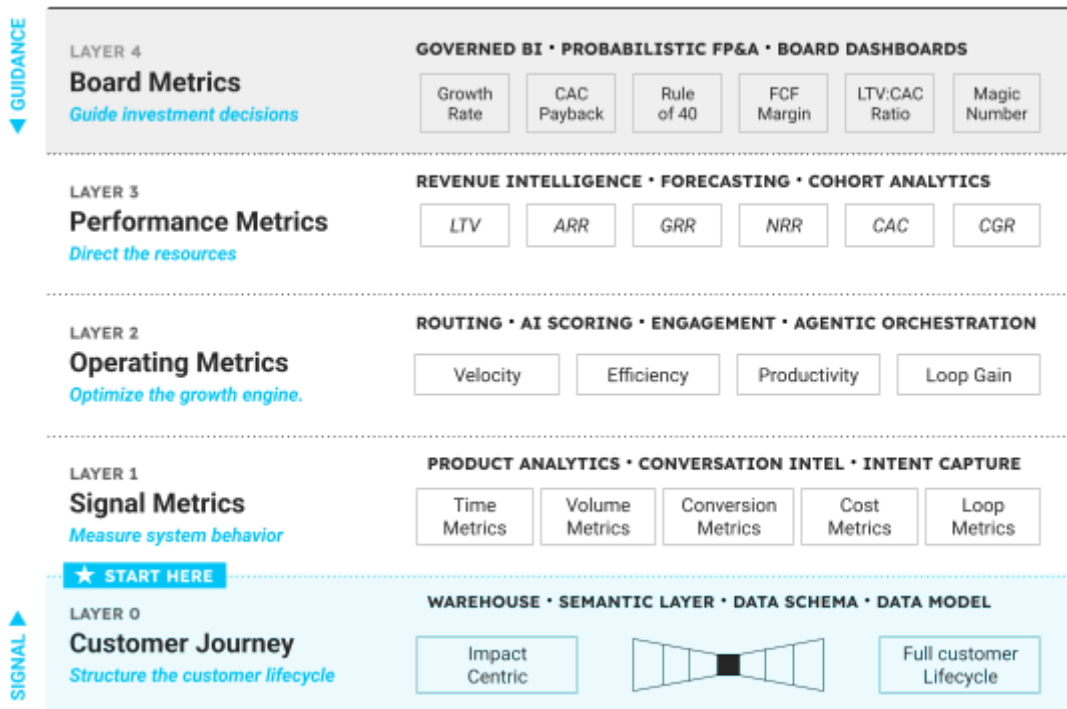


Figure 5. GTM as a layered system. Signal rises from the customer journey; guidance flows back down. Connect the layers and marginal gains at the base compound to investor outcomes.

IN CLOSING. DESIGN YOUR GTM SYSTEM

The companies pulling ahead aren't the ones with the most AI tools. They're the ones treating GTM as a system—people, workflows, data, and AI architected to work as one adaptive engine for growth.

Tools are bought. Systems are designed.

Only one creates a competitive advantage.

The question for the next decade isn't which tools you buy. It's how well your system is architected. Start with what you have. Connect what's already there. Thread AI through it. Let it compound.

About the Winning by Design Growth Institute: The Growth Institute is a community doing research focused on the applied study and synthesis of revenue architecture and growth systems. It integrates comparative field diagnostics with foundational systems theory to develop shared frameworks and language for designing, diagnosing, and governing compounding growth systems.

The Growth Institute serves as a think tank for revenue leaders navigating the transition from effort-driven growth to increasingly self-reinforcing systems. It provides in depth Working Papers, Executive Briefings and Application Notes,

Sign-up at <https://winningbydesign.com/growth-institute/> to become a member.