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A VITELIS POINT OF VIEW

The Gap Between Intent Signals and Deal Origination

Why modern deal origination should start with an evidence-based customer need—not a contact

> **Traditional sales treats a lead as a person to contact. Modern deal origination should treat a lead as an evidence-based hypothesis of a customer need.**

The starting point is wrong

Most B2B revenue teams begin in the same place: identify target accounts, find people with the right titles, pursue engagement, and use discovery to learn whether a meaningful problem exists. The process is familiar because it has been the dominant model for decades. It is also increasingly inefficient.

The sequence typically looks like this: company, contact, meeting, discovery, need, opportunity. Sellers spend substantial time trying to reach people before they know whether those people have a problem that is urgent, relevant, and commercially addressable. Discovery becomes an open-ended search for “what keeps you up at night?” rather than a focused validation of a credible business hypothesis.

Intent data was supposed to improve this model. It helps teams identify accounts showing research activity, engagement, or interest in a category. That can improve prioritization. But it does not solve the more important problem: activity does not explain what changed inside the business, what pain may exist, why the pain matters now, or which response is commercially relevant.

Intent can tell you where attention is moving. Deal origination requires a reason to believe that a customer need exists.

A lead should represent a need, not a name

The term "lead" has traditionally referred to a person: a name, title, email address, or form fill. But a person is not an opportunity. A person may be a stakeholder, a potential champion, a budget owner, or simply someone whose role fits a targeting rule. None of those facts establish that a deal should exist.

A more useful unit of work is the customer need. Not a generic industry problem and not a speculative pain point, but an evidence-based hypothesis that a specific business condition is creating a specific problem for a specific account.

This does not make people less important. Enterprise buying still depends on stakeholders, relationships, authority, influence, and organizational politics. But it changes the order of operations: start with the problem, then find the people who are most likely to own it, feel it, influence it, or fund its resolution.

The role of discovery changes as well. Discovery is no longer the first attempt to find a problem. It becomes the process of validating a well-supported hypothesis. The opening conversation moves from "Tell me about your priorities" to "We observed these challenges, and we believe they may be creating this business problem. Is that consistent with what you are seeing?"

That is a more credible conversation for the buyer and a more efficient one for the seller.

From data to signal to deal thesis

A practical deal-origination model distinguishes among three levels of intelligence. Each level has value, but only one is sufficient to support seller action.

Level	What it is	What it tells you	Appropriate action
Data	A raw event or observation	Something happened	Record and monitor
Signal	A relevant pattern of activity or change	This account deserves attention	Collect more evidence
Deal thesis	A supported need hypothesis connected to business impact, stakeholders, and an offer	There is a defensible reason to engage	Route to seller action and validate

A webinar registration is data. A cluster of research activity around cybersecurity following a major acquisition may be a signal. A deal thesis explains that the acquisition has likely created inconsistent identity controls across the combined organization, identifies the executives who own the exposure, and connects the problem to a credible solution.

The distinction matters because many revenue teams promote signals into pipeline before they have earned commercial meaning. The result is familiar: sellers receive alerts they do not trust, outreach becomes generic, and pipeline appears active without becoming more qualified.

What makes a customer-need hypothesis credible

A deal thesis does not require certainty. Before customer engagement, certainty is rarely possible. It requires enough evidence to justify focused action and a clear path for validation. Four elements create that standard.

1. A business event

A meaningful change creates pressure or alters priorities. Examples include a merger, leadership change, product launch, geographic expansion, restructuring, margin decline, regulatory change, cyber incident, supply disruption, or a public shift in strategy. The event is not the need, but it establishes why the account may be different now than it was six months ago.

2. Evidence of pain or exposure

The next question is whether the event has produced, revealed, or intensified a problem. Evidence may appear in earnings commentary, job postings, executive interviews, customer complaints, employee reviews, operational metrics, legal filings, service disruptions, partner announcements, or changes in investment. The strongest evidence is specific, recent, and traceable to its source.

3. A root-cause hypothesis

Naming a symptom is not enough. “The company has margin pressure” describes a condition, not a deal. A stronger hypothesis explains why the condition may exist—for example, duplicated systems after multiple acquisitions, low automation in a labor-intensive process, inconsistent pricing discipline, or fragmented ownership across business units. Root-cause reasoning gives the seller a sharper question to validate.

4. Commercial relevance

A genuine business problem is not automatically a relevant opportunity. The hypothesis must connect to an offer the seller can credibly provide, a stakeholder with reason to act, and a plausible business outcome. Without that connection, the work may be insightful but it is not deal origination.

A different sales motion

When the customer need becomes the starting point, several parts of the commercial motion change.

Contact-first motion	Need-first motion
Find people who match target titles	Identify an evidence-based customer need
Pursue engagement before commercial relevance is known	Determine why the account is worth engaging
Use broad discovery to search for pain	Use discovery to validate or refine the hypothesis
Personalize around role and company facts	Personalize around the account's likely business condition
Create pipeline when a person engages	Create a thesis when evidence supports a reason to act
Ask the seller to interpret multiple signals	Give the seller a concise, actionable account narrative

The need-first model does not eliminate prospecting, relationship development, or qualification. It improves the basis on which those activities begin. Sellers still need access to the right people. They simply approach those people with a more informed reason for the conversation.

Building a seller-ready deal thesis

A useful thesis should be short enough to act on and rigorous enough to trust. It should answer six questions:

- What changed inside or around the account?

- What evidence suggests a business pain or unmet need?
- What is the likely root cause?
- What is the probable business impact or exposure?
- Who is most likely to own, influence, or experience the problem?
- What is the next best action for the seller?

The output is not a research report. It is a working brief. A seller should be able to understand the logic, identify the likely stakeholders, and prepare for an initial conversation in a few minutes.

Validation test: signal or deal thesis?

Before treating an account as an originated opportunity, ask:

1. Can we name the business event or condition that changed?
2. Can we point to external evidence of pain, exposure, or unmet need?
3. Can we explain the likely root cause in one sentence?
4. Can we connect the need to a credible product or service?
5. Can we identify the stakeholders most likely to own or feel the problem?
6. Can the seller take a specific next step without rebuilding the analysis?

If the answers are vague, the account may still deserve monitoring—but it is not yet a deal thesis.

The larger implication

Most sales technology is designed to help teams execute the existing process faster: identify contacts, write outreach, record meetings, update CRM, and forecast activity. Those improvements matter. But they do not change the starting point.

The more fundamental opportunity is to change what the seller starts with. Instead of beginning with a person and searching for a problem, begin with evidence of a problem and identify the people who have a reason to solve it.

That shift does not remove human judgment from sales. It makes human judgment more valuable. Data captures events. Signals identify patterns. Reasoning connects those patterns to likely needs. Sellers then validate the thesis, navigate the organization, build trust, and shape a solution.

> **Before treating the next signal as an opportunity, ask whether your team can explain what changed, why it matters, who is affected, and what commercially credible response follows. If it cannot, the lead is still only a name—or the signal is still only data.**

About Vitelis' Deal Origination Platform (DOP)

Vitelis is a corporate MRI that uses external data to evaluate the performance of companies and unlock value. For B2B sales, Vitelis' Deal Origination Platform assesses accounts through the lens of a product or service portfolio to identify which accounts have the greatest needs. The DOP provides sellers with account intelligence; a prioritized list of opportunities within each account; and deal intelligence, including evidence-backed customer pains, Why Now, competitive positioning, MEDDPICC qualification, stakeholders to target, and a sales play for the deal – all before the first meeting.

To learn more, send an email to info@vitelis.com