

LeanData

CMO'S GUIDE TO BUYER JOURNEY ORCHESTRATION

DRIVING PIPELINE IN AN ERA OF AI AND SIGNAL OVERLOAD



INTRODUCTION

Marketing and sales are out of sync. CMOs need to step in and fix it.

Many of the processes intended to drive pipeline are failing today. Leads enter a workflow, get vaguely “scored” as an MQL based on early behavior, and then are lobbed over to sales, often prematurely, to do the heavy lifting.

Not only is this ineffective, but it’s detrimental to any business’s bottom line.

Quality pipeline is a major problem that’s rarely fixed for long. There’s a common perception that marketing sends junk leads, highly unlikely to convert. This creates a vicious cycle of wasted spend and mistrust. It can also create false confidence when it works well temporarily. This begs the question: Who then is responsible for ongoing quality pipeline?

Lead-centric strategies limit visibility into the entire buying committee. The buyer for high-consideration, sales-led purchases is typically a group of decision-makers who enter the buying cycle at different times. What can marketing do to adapt?

Buying groups outlast sales organization structures. As more teams reconsider SDR/BDR roles, rep profiles, assignment processes, tech stacks and more, it’s easy to get lost in sales structure rather than buyer needs. Who should represent the voice of the customer as go-to-market strategies evolve?

It’s time for marketing to take on the role of change agent and market driver. In an AI-obsessed world where a buyer-led journey generates an overwhelming flow of signals, marketing is well positioned to drive changes that increase revenue, improve conversion, and strengthen alignment with sales.

In other words, it’s marketing’s time to shine.

WHAT YOU’LL LEARN IN THIS GUIDE

- » Pitfalls and inefficiencies of current pipeline strategies.
- » Impact of a rapidly-evolving and self-guided buyer journey.
- » Strategies for building an effective, high-converting pipeline.
- » A roadmap for CMOs to own and optimize buyer journey orchestration.



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PART 01

THE PATH FROM MQL TOSS TO BUYER JOURNEY ORCHESTRATION



WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR QUALITY PIPELINE?

Today, marketing still focuses heavily on top-of-funnel (TOFU) lead volume rather than the quality of pipeline emerging from all buyer signals. And between sales and marketing, there is no clear accountability for how to reach any agreed level of quality.

Historically, marketing tactics were deemed successful if they drove a lot of leads. But here's the problem: not everyone who takes action on a B2B marketing campaign is ready to buy, even if they are the right person at the right company.

This creates a less-than-ideal scenario of high-volume, low-quality lead generation, which causes a slew of problems for sales teams:

- » **Too Much Emphasis on TOFU Conversions:** Most leads aren't adequately nurtured through the early research process before getting handed to sales to close.
- » **No Insight Into the Full Buying Committee:** Relying too heavily on MQLs and individual leads overlooks other players involved in complex B2B purchase decisions and the broader signals they generate.
- » **Lack of Qualified Pipeline Ownership:** Once leads are handed to sales, marketing rarely has visibility to how the buyer journey evolves across the account. The burden falls squarely on sales' shoulders.
- » **An Easy Blame Game:** While some companies have joint responsibilities by audience segment or go-to-market strategy, departmental ownerships with different definitions of success easily fall into forecast failure scapegoating.
- » **AI-Driven Complexity:** AI amplifies buyer activity and produces far more signals than teams can manage alone, requiring shared visibility and unified orchestration.

"As companies grow, pipeline will include contributions from more sources: marketing, sales, partners, and customer success. CMOs should work with their counterparts to measure and predict growth quarter over quarter from all sources, drilling into where blockage is occurring and identifying ways to accelerate progress. It could be as simple as providing a self-serve product tour to all influencers at a "TOFU" account to get them more quickly into a consideration phase."



Alison Murdock
Founder & Chief Marketer
Trusted CMO

COMMON FAILURE MODES OF MQL MARKETING

There are five core issues why the traditional lead-centric demand gen model is ineffective at driving revenue, especially in a world where AI accelerates buyer activity and produces far more signals than scoring models can interpret. These gaps place added strain on an already complicated marketing-sales relationship:

1 High Number of Research Leads Marked as Ready to Buy

When you reach out too soon, you get ghosted. If a champion is ready, but the organization is not, you get one call with one person that goes nowhere. In today's world, a single player is never a true opportunity.

100% vs. 30%

Companies typically hit 100% of their MQL goal, but only 30% of their pipeline goal.

(Madkudu)

2 Low Lead-to-Opportunity Conversion

MQL conversion rates are often disappointingly low. That's why it's important to track Contact-to-MQL and MQL-to-Opportunity conversions at every stage through Closed Won and even churn.

You might be below average for your own benchmarks, or for your industry. Plus, you may be setting sales up for failure down the line. Does a single prospect identity even count as an opportunity?

As a result, you may have to adjust scoring to really reflect intent and not just "human asked for demo" or "amazing account just read a blog post."



Maura Ginty

Marketing Advisor & Fractional CMO
Maeve Consulting

COMMON FAILURE MODES OF MQL MARKETING (CONTINUED)

3

Too Many Single-Contact Opportunities

Most leads passed to sales come as single contacts (aka, individual leads). However, complex B2B purchase decisions rarely come down to one stakeholder and, instead require input from several decision-makers. Without orchestrating signals across the account, these premature opportunities stall.

4

Limited Visibility Into Buying Team Interactions

Relying on individual leads leaves sales with a blind spot: they have little line of sight into where each stakeholder within a buying committee is along the purchase journey. Signals scattered across the CRM, marketing automation, sales engagement and intent tools make it challenging to establish strategies for buying group plays.

100 MQLS

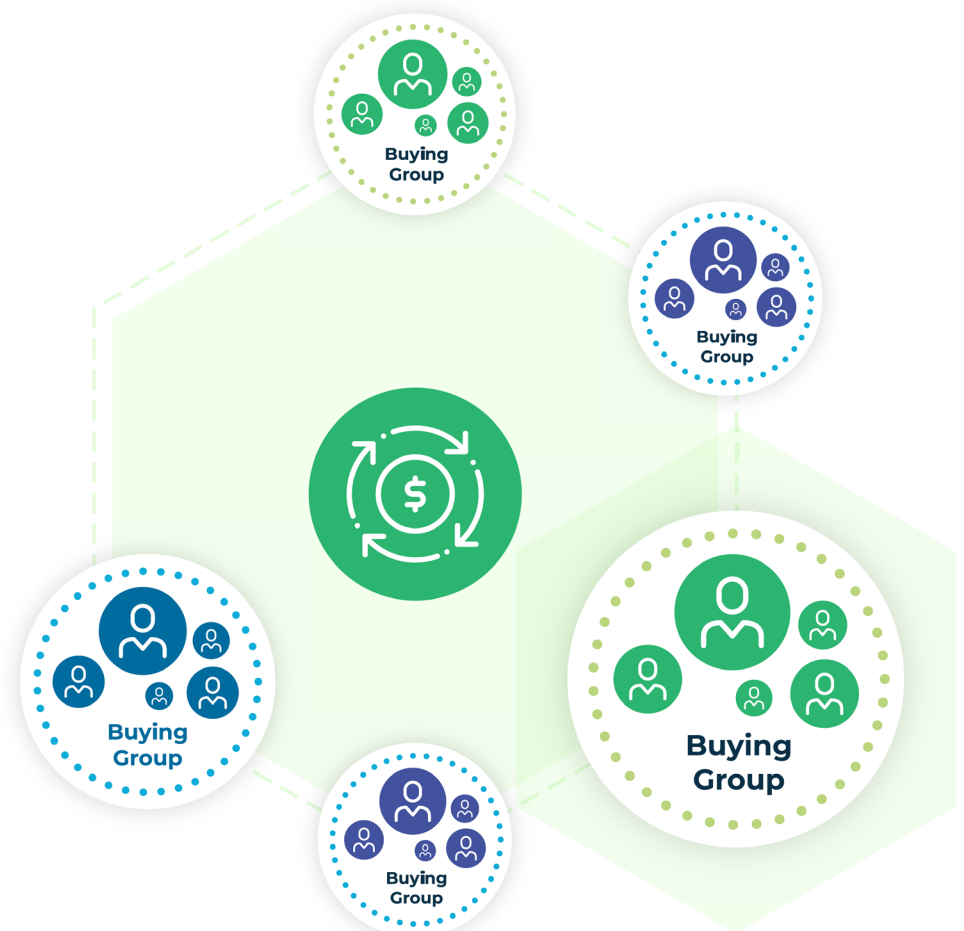
yield approximately 13 SQLs.

(ClickUp)

5

Overreliance on Lead Volume, Under Reliance on Readiness

For many SDR, BDR, and marketing teams, growing lead volume is consistently a metric of success. But quantity does not equal quality, and individual interactions do not reveal readiness. When signals across the buying team are connected into an account map with shared digital behavior, you gain a far clearer indicator of true intent.



PART 02

AN INCREASINGLY SELF- GUIDED BUYING JOURNEY



THE B2B BUYING JOURNEY HAS CHANGED

In the past, buyers needed sellers to navigate complex solutions and get basic information.

Today, the journey is primarily self-guided. Buyers research on their own, compare vendors, consult peers, and use AI tools long before they talk to sales.

The 2025 6sense B2B **Buyer Experience Report** found that buyers now complete roughly 60% of their journey before first contact, and 95% of the time the winning vendor is already on the shortlist.

From a marketing perspective, B2B buyers tend to fall into two categories:

- » Those who voluntarily expose themselves by reaching out directly; or
- » Those exhibiting buying signals that demand timely, well-orchestrated follow-up.

Unfortunately, buyers who are actively moving through a decision process represent only a small fraction of the MQLs passed to sales. The real challenge is interpreting incomplete, fragmented signals from self-guided journeys and turning them into a clear picture of where accounts and buying groups are in their decision process.

It starts with signal management.

“In marketing, our job is to capture and create demand. We must listen to customers, understand buyer conversations with sales, and track market signals like competition and intent. Then, we turn this intel into compelling campaigns that move buyers into action. This coordination allows marketing to drive demand into qualified pipeline for sales. Even if we don’t own 100% of the pipeline target, marketing plays a critical role in orchestrating the efforts that generate buyer interest in your brand.”



Katie Foote
CMO
CaptivateIQ

BUYING GROUP SIGNAL MANAGEMENT AS A PIPELINE FOUNDATION

Marketing must take the lead qualification process one step beyond “right person at the right company” taking an early stage action.

Instead of simply passing over leads in bulk, marketing teams should treat the signals available to them, whether it’s a single content interaction, an anonymous website visit, or early buying group engagement, as a starting point for comprehensive account and opportunity mapping.

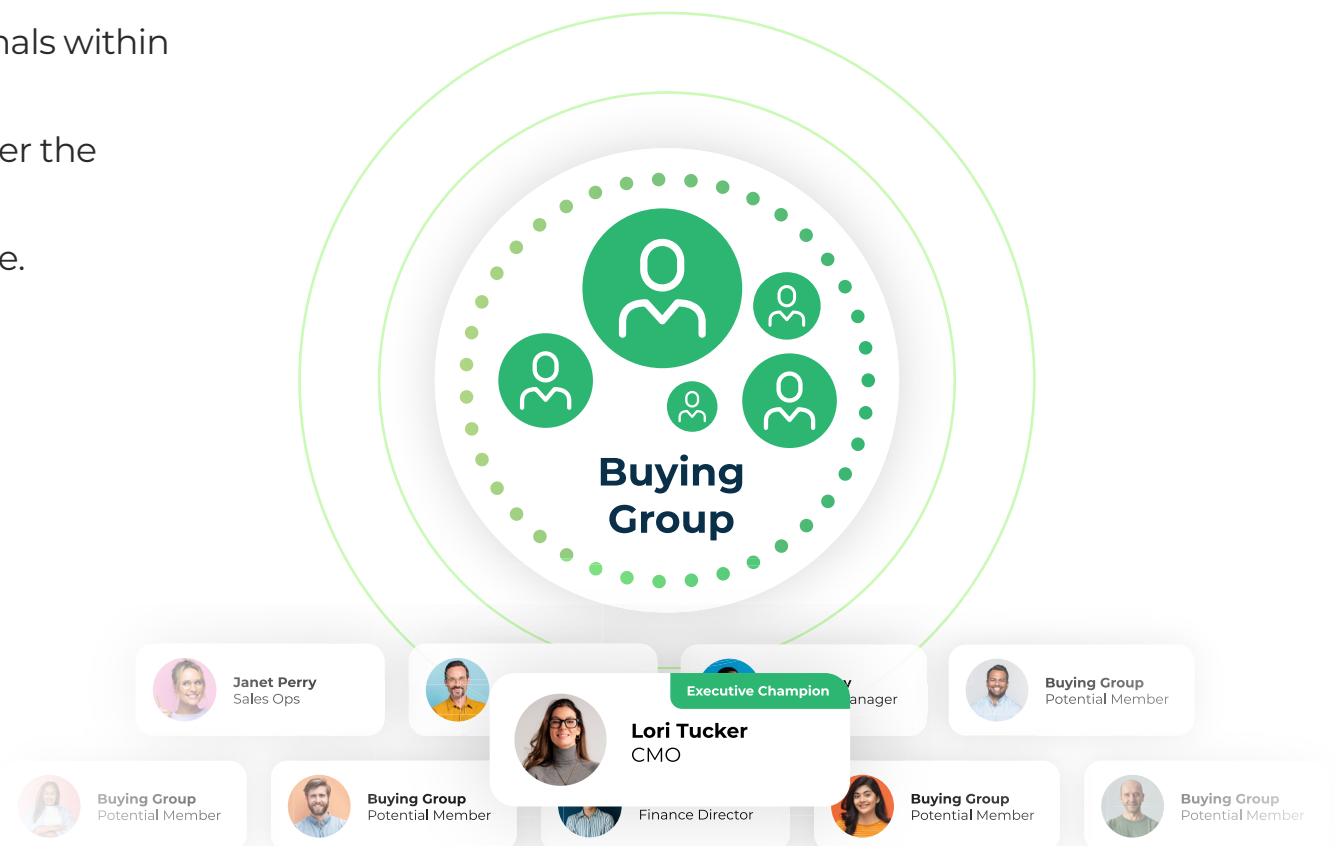
The goal is to form a qualified opportunity that:

- » Contains multiple people manifesting buying signals within the same organization.
- » Adds new contacts to the opportunity as they enter the buying group.
- » Nurtures the buying group through the sales cycle.

For marketing, this is a bit of a paradigm shift.

No longer is it sufficient for B2B marketing teams to simply track, collect, and react to intent data in isolation. Instead, they must embrace a more proactive, signal-based approach to understanding, evaluating, and orchestrating a qualified opportunity at the buying group level.

Doing so gives marketing teams an undeniable value-add role in the revenue process, supports the sales team’s success, and creates a stronger foundation for pipeline that can be measured, forecasted and improved over time.



PART 03

CREATING PIPELINE THROUGH BUYING GROUP ORCHESTRATION



WHY PIPELINE STARTS WITH BUYING GROUPS

Given these changes to the B2B buying journey, marketing teams face growing pressure to shift from “lead generation” to “opportunity creation.” This shift addresses many of the challenges tied to traditional MQL models including:

- » Long sales cycles
- » Poor buying experience
- » Leaky sales funnels
- » Wasted marketing investment



WHAT IS A BUYING GROUP?

A buying group includes all the individuals who influence or participate in an organization’s purchase decision, each bringing their own research, experience, and perspectives. Many accounts contain multiple buying groups exploring separate initiatives. An opportunity-centric motion creates visibility into all of them, revealing where true purchase momentum exists.

WHY BUYING GROUPS REQUIRE ORCHESTRATION

A modern pipeline strategy grows revenue by aligning revenue teams early around a unified account view and the full buying group, not isolated leads.

This approach recognizes where marketing excels: **identifying audience segments, interpreting signals, and understanding how different stakeholders move through their journey.**

In an opportunity-centric motion (aka, a Buying Groups GTM motion), marketing does more than hand over individual leads.

Instead, marketing assembles a complete picture of the buying group by interpreting signals across systems, identifying who is involved, and nurturing them collectively. Once a defined threshold of buying group engagement is reached, marketing activates an opportunity for sales, equipping them with insight into roles, priorities, and internal dynamics.

Because big B2B decisions rarely come from a single contact, this coordinated approach creates meaningful value for sales. It ensures that when sales engages, the buyer group is already aligned, engaged, and moving toward consensus.

THE BENEFITS OF A BUYING GROUPS GTM MOTION

Among the many advantages of transitioning to an opportunity-centric motion, a few consistently rise to the top:

REVENUE GROWTH

A Buying Groups Motion goes far beyond net-new lead acquisition. It uncovers expansion opportunities within existing accounts by revealing buying groups pursuing parallel or emerging needs. These opportunities often remain hidden in traditional lead models.

Palo Alto Networks' Buying Group GTM Results

- 2x the close won rate
- 20% improvement in MQL to Opportunity
- 15% improvement in revenue

BETTER CONVERSION

A Buying Groups Motion improves both the volume and quality of pipeline. It also reduces cycle times by building internal alignment earlier. Marketing and sales benefit from knowing the broader context of the purchase: who is involved, what they care about, and how they are progressing.

Delivering a verified buying group to sales results in a 20% to 50% improvement in conversion rates.
(Forrester)

In bigger buying groups, sales outreach can increase conversions by 3.4 — 4.4x if sales talk to 11+ people instead of just one person.
(influ2)

5% to 15% increase in hidden opportunities as a result of an opportunity-based Buying Groups Motion.
(Forrester)

EFFICIENCY GAINS

An orchestrated opportunity qualification approach helps teams eliminate low-quality work and stop chasing buyers who are not progressing. This frees sales to focus energy where purchase intent is real.

Reltio's Buying Groups GTM Results

- 39% improvement in conversion rates
- > 30 day improvement in deal velocity
- 71% improvement in new logo revenue

As shared at a [Forrester Webinar](#)

GREATER ALIGNMENT

A Buying Groups Motion strengthens alignment across marketing, operations, and sales by rooting the GTM motion in shared signals, shared visibility, and shared definitions of opportunity. This clarity enables teams to coordinate engagement and accelerate revenue together.



PART 04

CMOS: TAKE THE REINS OF BUYER JOURNEY ORCHESTRATION



IF MARKETERS OWN MARKET, WE OWN PIPELINE

There's no doubt that a disconnect exists between marketing and sales, and it continues to limit both teams from performing at their best.

This is the ideal moment for CMOs to lead, championing an opportunity-centric approach that positions marketing as a key driver of predictable and measurable revenue impact.

Shifting to a Buying Groups GTM Motion does not happen overnight. It requires top-down change within marketing, shared definitions across go-to-market teams, and strong alignment with sales and customer success. It also requires coordinating signals, systems, and processes in a way that reflects how buyers actually buy today.

By leading this shift, CMOs demonstrate their ability to directly influence revenue outcomes and elevate their strategic role. **This reframes CMOs as leaders of buyer journey orchestration, not just leaders of brand.**

Plus, this efficiency in pipeline management reflects a sophisticated understanding of marketing's role in revenue generation, strengthening the CMO's leadership profile. Not to mention, CMOs will gain credibility and recognition for fostering cross-functional collaboration.

"Marketing and sales alignment are key to driving revenue predictability, velocity and repeatability. No one wins unless the company hits the ARR numbers. If you only care about your top of funnel goals, you will not maintain sales alignment or hit your ARR repeatedly. True leaders align to ensure that what they deliver converts and drives success for the business. This will earn you the trust of sales, the CEO and the Board."



Tricia Gellman
CMO
Box

WHY SHOULD CMOs LEAD THIS CHARGE?

For starters, because marketing is the demand entry point for this entire process.

Marketing teams launch programs, capture signals, and shape early buyer perception. Before anything is passed to sales, CMOs are uniquely positioned to retool qualification processes and make opportunity-centric buyer journey orchestration the new standard.

However, this evolution cannot happen in a silo. It requires close partnership with sales and operations to reshape definitions, workflows, and handoff processes.

Look at the data and ask yourself the following risk questions:

- » Are you satisfied with your MQL-to-Opportunity conversion rate?
- » Do you know the core roles that consistently appear in your product's buying group?
- » When a second lead surfaces from an account with an open opportunity, how is it handled?
- » Are you capturing signals across multiple buying group members, not just one?
- » How many contacts are typically attached to an opportunity today?
- » How much higher is your win rate when more buying group members are attached?

Selling to buying groups means people, processes, and technology must evolve. CMOs should meet with stakeholders across sales, marketing, operations, and customer success to understand how each team influences, and is influenced by, an opportunity-based approach.

Learn how the work actually gets done, then map the system-wide changes required to support orchestration.

At the end of the day, this is a rare opportunity for CMOs to make a direct, visible impact on business growth and increase their influence on strategic outcomes.

"Modern CMOs must own pipeline, and to own pipeline is to own insights into the buying group. That starts with compelling brand introductions and ends with pattern-matching on the opportunities that will become our company's best future customers."



Maura Ginty

Marketing Advisor & Fractional CMO
Maeve Consulting

CONCLUSION



BUYING GROUPS, SIGNALS, AND THE NEW PIPELINE ADVANTAGE

It's past time for demand capture to evolve.

Approaching pipeline orchestration through the narrow lens of the MQL will not drive the predictable, scalable growth modern organizations require. Nor will it create the alignment needed for marketing and sales to amplify each other's efforts.

The next era of pipeline effectiveness begins with a Buying Groups GTM Motion, where all stakeholders involved in a purchase are identified, aligned, and nurtured as a coordinated group across the entire journey.

This is the path to stronger revenue outcomes. But for an opportunity-centric motion to take hold, someone must lead the organizational shift. That leader should be the CMO.

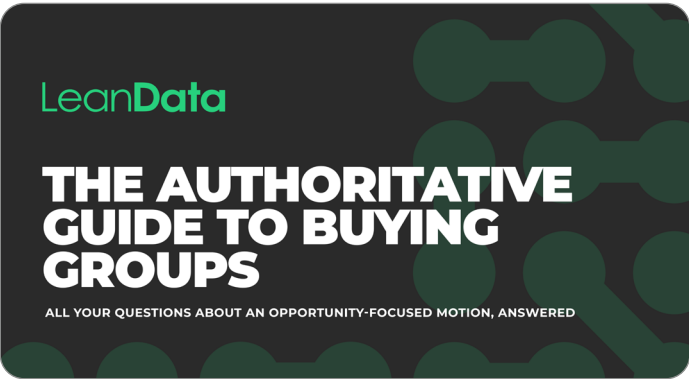
So CMOs, seize this moment. Redefine how your company interprets signals, assembles buying groups, and orchestrates pipeline from first touch to closed-won to renewal.

**CONTACT
LEANDATA**

for a **Buying Groups
readiness assessment** today.

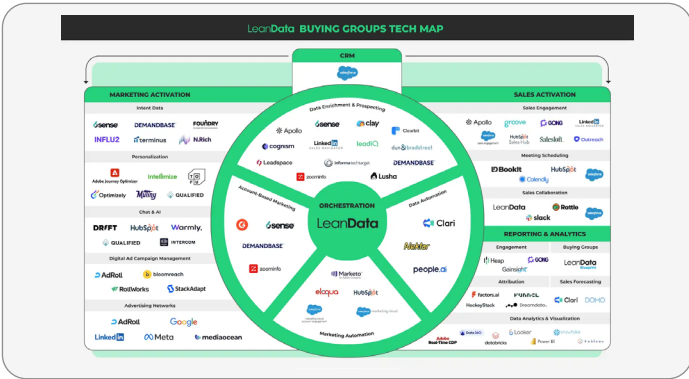


RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



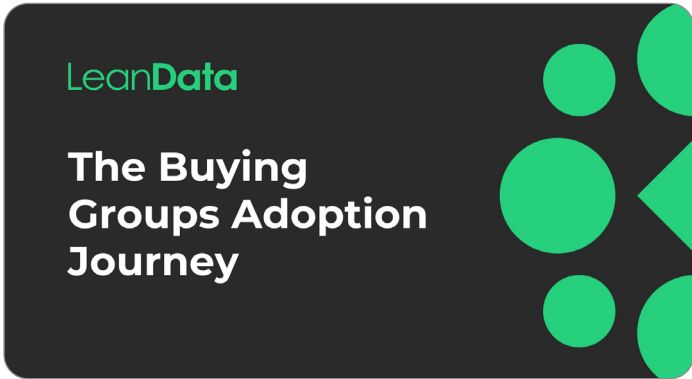
EBOOK

[The Authoritative Guide to Buying Groups](#)



INFOGRAPHIC

[Buying Groups Motion Tech Stack Map](#)



EBOOK

[The Buying Groups Adoption Journey](#)

START YOUR OPPORTUNITY-CENTRIC JOURNEY

To learn more, visit the [LeanData Buying Groups Resource Center](#) today.

CONSULT WITH AN EXPERT

Why LeanData?

LeanData helps B2B enterprises fuel efficient growth by aligning marketing, sales, and customer service execution with the buyer journey. Our Intelligent GTM Orchestration platform acts as the connective tissue across the revenue lifecycle, integrating and normalizing buyer data, automating signal-driven workflows, and delivering AI-powered insights. The result is faster, cleaner execution and the ability to adapt GTM motions with agility without coding. More than 1,000 leading companies and a community of 5,000+ OpsStars rely on LeanData to achieve speed to lead, higher conversions, accelerated pipeline, and predictable growth by turning buyer signals into coordinated action.