SERPIFAI

# Four-Boundary Competitor Scope Guide

A portable decision handoff for buyer, offer, market and geography/serviceability scope.

### Decision rule

**Keep one competitor view only when boundary differences do not materially change realistic alternatives, competitor role, serviceability, evidence validity or permitted downstream use.**

Prepared by Pero Baldjiev. Worked examples are fictional composites unless explicitly stated otherwise.

# 1. The decision in one page

A competitor can be a valid identity yet be irrelevant to a particular decision. The four boundaries below test whether observations belong in the same comparison view.

| | |
|---|---|
| **PROCEED** | Use one scoped view when buyer, offer, market/job and geography/serviceability differences do not materially change the comparison. |
| **SPLIT** | Create a separate view only for the boundary or boundaries that materially change inclusion, role, substitutability, serviceability, evidence, benchmark validity, permitted use or decision consequence. |
| **RESOLVE** | When a valid boundary is still unknown, keep it unresolved and gather evidence before consequential use. Unknown is not equivalent to same. |

| BUYER | OFFER |
|---|---|
| Who is making the choice, including buying-group roles and the job that shapes alternatives? | Which exact product, tier, package, service or module is being compared? |
| MARKET / JOB<br>What demand or substitution space defines the choice? | GEOGRAPHY / SERVICEABILITY<br>Where can the alternative actually serve the scoped buyer under relevant feasibility constraints? |

**Sparse-view principle: do not build the full buyer x offer x market x geography Cartesian matrix. Create only the views a real decision needs.**

## 2. One competitor list fails in four different ways

Fictional composite: a B2B software company sells both a self-serve offer and an enterprise platform. Its enterprise buying group includes a department leader, IT/security and procurement. Public search data identifies large global platforms, while customer and procurement evidence also surfaces a spreadsheet, an implementation consultancy and a local EU provider.

| Boundary | What changes | Why the competitor set can change | Decision consequence |
|---|---|---|---|
| Buyer | Individual practitioner -> enterprise buying group | Procurement/security requirements introduce alternatives and exclusions the user alone may never consider. | Do not generalize self-serve alternatives to enterprise procurement. |
| Offer | Self-serve plan -> enterprise platform | A spreadsheet may substitute for simple self-serve work while a consultancy or platform competes for enterprise implementation. | Compare the exact offer, not the parent company in aggregate. |
| Market / job | Lightweight task -> regulated cross-team workflow | Shared category labels or keywords can hide different buyer jobs and substitution patterns. | Define the buyer choice before counting category overlap as competition. |
| Geography / serviceability | Global visibility -> regulated EU feasibility | A visible global vendor may be unavailable; a local provider may be commercially central despite low global search visibility. | Use actual serviceability rather than country labels or search visibility alone. |

**The same competitor identity may legitimately appear in multiple scoped views. That is not duplicate identity; it is scoped relevance.**

# 3. Buyer boundary

The buyer boundary identifies the person or group whose decision process determines the realistic alternatives. It is not automatically a marketing persona and it is not automatically the end user.

## Ask

- Who can initiate, influence, approve, block, procure or ratify the decision?
- What job or problem context makes alternatives relevant?
- Does changing the buyer or buying group change realistic alternatives, evidence requirements or permitted downstream use?

## Split the view when

- A different buyer or buying group materially changes the alternatives considered.
- Procurement, security, finance or other ratifiers introduce feasibility requirements that change inclusion/exclusion.
- The buyer job changes enough to alter substitution or benchmark validity.

## Do not split merely because

- Two persona names or job titles exist but the same alternatives remain realistic.
- Stakeholders differ in message preference while the underlying choice set is unchanged.

| State | Meaning | Safe action |
|---|---|---|
| ESTABLISHED | Buyer/buying group is supported well enough for this decision. | Compare effects. |
| UNRESOLVED | The relevant buying authority/job is not yet established. | Resolve scope before consequential use. |
| MATERIAL EFFECT | Buyer difference changes alternatives/evidence/permitted use. | Create the smallest necessary separate view. |

# 4. Offer boundary

The offer boundary defines the exact commercial unit being compared. Company, brand, product family, platform, module, tier, package and service model are not interchangeable units of analysis.

## Ask

- Which exact product, tier, package, module or service is the buyer considering?
- Does a free/self-serve offer compete with the same alternatives as an enterprise or managed-service offer?
- Would the same parent company play a different role for another offer?

## Common scope failures

| Failure | Correction |
|---|---|
| Company vs product | Keep canonical company identity, but scope relevance at the actual offer level. |
| Product family vs one module | Name the unit the buyer can choose. |
| Free plan vs enterprise | Test whether price, service and procurement requirements change alternatives. |
| Software vs managed service | Treat service model as material when it changes the buyer job or feasible substitutes. |
| Bundle vs point solution | Test the actual substitution decision rather than assuming category equivalence. |

**Rule: one competitor identity can appear in several offer-scoped views without creating duplicate canonical identities.**

# 5. Market boundary: define the buyer choice, not just the label

For practical competitor analysis, market scope should approximate the demand or substitution space relevant to the decision. Industry, analyst category, keyword cluster and market are not automatically the same thing.

| Condition | Signal | Response |
|---|---|---|
| Market too broad | Many included firms do not solve the same buyer job or would not be considered substitutes. | Narrow to the buyer problem/use case and realistic substitution. |
| Market too narrow | Meaningful substitutes are excluded because they use another category label or delivery model. | Expand beyond category labels where buyer substitution supports it. |
| Category overlap without substitution | Shared terminology/search visibility but different buyer jobs or feasible use. | Do not treat overlap alone as competition. |
| Substitution without category overlap | Different category labels but the buyer can realistically choose one instead of another. | Include when evidence supports the same decision/job. |

## If market scope is unresolved

Record RESOLVE_SCOPE. Do not silently generalize from an analyst category, industry label or keyword set. Gather customer, sales, win/loss, product-use or other decision-relevant substitution evidence.

This guide supports practical competitor scoping. It does not provide a legal antitrust market definition.

# 6. Geography is a serviceability test

Geography matters when location changes feasibility, buyer choice, evidence validity or service delivery. The governing question is not simply "which country?" but "can this alternative actually serve this buyer for this offer and job under the relevant conditions?"

| Serviceability condition | How it can change relevance |
|---|---|
| Regulation / data residency | Can exclude an otherwise visible vendor or change required evidence. |
| Language | Can change onboarding, support, implementation or buyer confidence when material. |
| Licensing | May make an offer unavailable or differently packaged. |
| Distribution / reseller coverage | Commercial availability can depend on channel or partner coverage. |
| Shipping / local inventory | Physical availability and lead time can change realistic alternatives. |
| Sales coverage | A vendor may be visible but unable or unwilling to sell into the scoped segment. |
| Implementation coverage | Local delivery capability can make a service or platform feasible or infeasible. |
| Payment / regional terms | Regional pricing, payment or contracting constraints can alter the buyer choice. |

**If serviceability is genuinely equivalent across geographies, keep geography as metadata rather than creating unnecessary views.**

# 7. Boundaries interact - test the effect, not the label

| Interaction | Example | Material when... | Typical action |
|---|---|---|---|
| Buyer x Offer | Practitioner self-serve vs procurement-led enterprise | The buying process plus packaging changes realistic alternatives. | Split only the needed offer/buyer views. |
| Buyer x Market | Same company, different buyer job | The buyer job changes substitution. | Split by the job/market if alternatives change. |
| Offer x Market | Module vs platform for different use case | The exact offer competes in a different consideration set. | Scope at offer + job. |
| Offer x Geography | Enterprise tier available only in selected regions | Serviceability differs by offer. | Split geography only for the affected offer. |
| Market x Geography | Local regulations alter feasible substitutes | Local conditions change the realistic set. | Create a serviceable market view. |
| Buyer x Geography | Procurement requirements differ by region | Buyer-group constraints change feasibility. | Re-scope only where the decision changes. |
| All four | Enterprise regulated procurement for a specific job | Multiple boundaries materially change inclusion/evidence/use. | Create the smallest sparse set of views; avoid matrix explosion. |

**Materiality trigger: split only when a boundary changes inclusion/exclusion, competitor role, substitutability, serviceability, evidence required, benchmark validity, permitted downstream use or the decision consequence.**

# 8. Keep, split or resolve

Use this deterministic sequence. Do not replace it with a score.

| Step | Action | Output |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Define the decision | Name exactly what will use the competitor view. |
| 2 | Bound buyer | Name buyer/buying group and relevant job. |
| 3 | Bound offer | Name exact product/tier/package/service. |
| 4 | Bound market/job | Define realistic choice/substitution space. |
| 5 | Test geography/serviceability | Confirm actual feasibility conditions. |
| 6 | Compare effects | For each boundary: SAME, MATERIAL or UNKNOWN. |
| 7 | Apply outcome | Keep one view, split only material boundaries, or resolve scope. |
| 8 | Version/reopen | Record owner, effective period and review trigger. |

## Outcome states

| Outcome | Meaning |
|---|---|
| USE ONE SCOPED VIEW | No boundary materially changes the comparison for this decision. |
| SPLIT BY ONE BOUNDARY | One boundary is material. |
| SPLIT BY MULTIPLE BOUNDARIES | More than one boundary is material; create sparse views only. |
| RESOLVE SCOPE | Valid controlled inputs show an unresolved/unknown boundary. |
| REOPEN EXISTING VIEW | A material change makes the current version potentially stale. |
| INVALID / INCOMPLETE | Do not use the result until malformed or missing controlled inputs are corrected. |

# 9. Portable scoped-view handoff

Record enough context so another person can understand what this view may and may not support. The workbook provides the operating register; this page is the portable handoff.

| Field | Record |
|---|---|
| Decision | _____ |
| Buyer / buying group | _____ |
| Offer | _____ |
| Market / buyer job | _____ |
| Geography / serviceability | _____ |
| Included competitors | _____ |
| Key exclusions + reason | _____ |
| Permitted downstream use | _____ |
| Unsupported use | _____ |
| Evidence / effective date | _____ |
| Owner / version | _____ |
| Review trigger | _____ |

**Handoff rule: downstream analyses inherit the scope limitations of this competitor view. A valid scoped view is not permission to generalize beyond it.**

# 10. Review, reopen and evidence limits

## Reopen when

- Buyer authority, buying group or job changes materially.
- Product, tier, package or service model changes materially.
- Buyer problem/use case or substitution evidence changes.
- Geographic/serviceability conditions change, including regulation, language, licensing, distribution or implementation coverage.
- The intended downstream use becomes broader or more consequential.
- The review/evidence date passes the team's defined trigger.

## Product boundaries

This guide does not provide live competitive-intelligence monitoring, CRM integration, market-share data, legal antitrust market definition, proprietary buyer datasets, automatic market sizing, commercial-outcome validation or continuous geography-availability monitoring.

## Representative source families

**Forrester - buying-group roles:** https://www.forrester.com/blogs/buying-groups-and-opportunities-are-the-new-leads/

**Strategyzer - Value Proposition Canvas:** https://www.strategyzer.com/library/the-value-proposition-canvas

**Productboard - customer segments:** https://support.productboard.com/hc/en-us/articles/360056352953-Customer-segments

**Intercom - Jobs to be Done:** https://www.intercom.com/blog/jobs-to-be-done/

**U.S. DOJ - market definition:** https://www.justice.gov/atr/market-definition

**UK CMA - Merger Assessment Guidelines:** https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/merger-assessment-guidelines

**OECD - geographic level of competition:** https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2024/06/the-geographic-level-of-competition-and-the-use-of-market-data_1a2dbcc9.html

**Ahrefs - organic competitors:** https://help.ahrefs.com/en/articles/1437336-what-are-organic-competitors

**Semrush - organic competitors:** https://www.semrush.com/kb/32-organic-research-competitors-report

**Similarweb - competitors:** https://support.similarweb.com/hc/en-us/articles/360000805857-Website-Competitors

**Shopify - markets / regional availability:** https://help.shopify.com/en/manual/international/managing

**AWS - Regions and Availability Zones:** https://aws.amazon.com/about-aws/global-infrastructure/regions_az/

These sources support components of buyer roles, customer/job linkage, substitution/market reasoning, competitor discovery and serviceability. No single source establishes a complete four-boundary competitor scope for a specific organization; that conclusion requires decision-specific evidence.