OPERATING METHOD HANDOFF

Emerging Competitor Evaluation Handoff

A practical field guide for deciding what incomplete evidence about a new competitor justifies doing now.

> Limited history should change the evidence standard - not give permission to invent history.

The operating question

What does the evidence justify us doing now - **IGNORE, INVESTIGATE, MONITOR or RESPOND** - and what future evidence would change that action?

OBSERVE
What actually changed?

SCOPE
Does it affect this buyer, job, offer, geography or decision?

CORROBORATE
Is the support genuinely independent?

INTERPRET
What can be concluded, and what remains INFERRED or UNRESOLVED?

ACT
Ignore, investigate, monitor or respond.

REOPEN
What evidence would escalate, downgrade or reverse the action?

These actions are practical operating states, not competitor categories.

Attention is not threat.
Visibility can justify investigation without proving buyer competition.

Repetition is not corroboration.
Ten pages repeating one announcement can still be one underlying signal.

Trajectory is not destiny.
Directional evidence supports review, not a forecast of future dominance.

AI cannot manufacture buyer relevance.
Automation can summarize evidence, not silently upgrade its state.

1 - PRESENT STATE FIRST

Current capability and historical scale are different

A young entrant can lack market-share history, long revenue records and analyst coverage while still having a product that scoped buyers can purchase and use now.

Verify present-state facts first

- Working product or service availability.
- Relevant capability for the scoped buyer problem.
- Pricing, packaging or procurement path where observable.
- Implementation and geographic serviceability.
- Certifications and integrations that affect purchase.
- Verified customer use or buyer-decision evidence.

Historical strength is a lagging indicator. Missing lagging history should narrow the claim, not create a fictional history.

A lifecycle example

Time	Evidence change	Defensible action
Day 0	Funding + launch coverage; serviceability unclear	**INVESTIGATE**
Week 6	Working enterprise product + relevant integrations	**MONITOR** targeted evidence
Month 3	Repeated scoped RFP/shortlist + verified serviceability	**RESPOND** where decisions are affected
Month 6	Expected adoption fails or entrant leaves scope	Downgrade / reduce monitoring; supersede prior assessment

Decision rule: sparse history can justify investigation or monitoring before it justifies a strategic response.

2 - EVIDENCE QUALITY

Use an evidence ladder - then check provenance

Level	Evidence	What it can support
A	Repeated shortlist/RFP, win-loss, verified buyer use	Current scoped competitive relevance
B	Working product, procurement, pricing, certifications, relevant integrations	Current capability and serviceability
C	Releases, customer references, expansion, operational partnerships, role-specific hiring	Trajectory when corroborated
D	Funding, press, search/AI visibility, social attention, traffic spikes	Discovery / investigation
Inference	Analyst interpretation	A bounded interpretation when clearly labelled

> There is no universal number of signals that is enough. What matters is whether independent, decision-relevant evidence changes the action you can defend.

Corroboration has layers

Pattern	Meaning	Decision value
Ten articles repeat one press release	**Source multiplication:** many URLs, one underlying signal	Not ten confirmations
Funding + enterprise hiring + live compliance documentation	**Signal corroboration:** distinct signal families	Stronger trajectory evidence
Those signals + repeated scoped RFP/win-loss evidence	**Buyer corroboration**	Much stronger evidence of current relevance

Rule: more repetition of the same underlying signal is not more independent evidence. Trace provenance before interpreting volume.

3 - FALSE POSITIVES

Attention is not threat

Discovery strength

Search growth, AI citations, social attention, funding, press and hiring.

Can reveal an entrant worth investigating. Depends on source independence and persistence.

Competitive strength

Same-buyer choice, RFP/shortlist, win-loss, verified use, serviceability and procurement eligibility.

More directly supports current scoped relevance. Still does not prove future dominance or market share.

> Visibility can earn investigation. It does not, by itself, make the entrant a buyer alternative.

False-positive controls

Signal	Why it is noisy alone	Verify next
Funding	Capital is not buyer adoption	Capability, serviceability, buyer evidence
Hiring	May be replacement, evergreen or speculative	Role specificity, persistence, product/market changes
Partnership	May never become operational	Live distribution/integration/buyer use
One customer logo	Scope and use depth may be unknown	Use case, buyer match, repeated evidence
Search/AI spike	Attention is not substitution	Persistence, scoped queries, buyer evidence

4 - FALSE NEGATIVES

Protect against quiet entry modes

Conventional monitoring can miss entrants whose distribution or adoption appears before familiar revenue, SEO or analyst signals.

Entry model	Why it can be missed	What to watch
Open source / community	Usage can precede commercial revenue	Adoption, support, enterprise serviceability, buyer use
PLG	Product usage can precede CRM/ sales evidence	Usage, paid conversion, enterprise procurement
Platform bundling	Existing distribution hides a new standalone GTM	Bundled availability, entitlements, buyer migration
Partner-led GTM	Direct site/traffic understates reach	Partner directories, co-sell, operational channel evidence
Adjacent incumbent	Not discovered through startup watchlists	New offer, cross-sell, serviceability, buyer substitution
Enterprise stealth	Little public marketing	RFPs, procurement, hiring, private customer references

AI-assisted monitoring boundary

AI can accelerate discovery, collection, deduplication, clustering and summarization. It should preserve underlying sources and evidence states. It must not silently convert funding, search growth, hiring, press or social attention into buyer relevance or strategic threat, and it must not upgrade an **INFERRED** interpretation into **OBSERVED** evidence.

5 - SEPARATE THE DIMENSIONS

Keep assessment, evidence state and monitoring action separate

Dimension	States	Purpose
Current assessment	CURRENTLY RELEVANT; PROVISIONAL EMERGING; REFERENCE ONLY; UNRESOLVED; EXCLUDED; INVALID INPUT	What is supported now
Evidence state	OBSERVED; INFERRED; UNRESOLVED	How directly the claim is supported
Monitoring action	ACTIVE MONITOR; TARGETED WATCH; LOW-INTENSITY WATCH; RESOLVE EVIDENCE; NO MONITORING	What recurring attention is justified

> Do not compress these dimensions into a numerical threat score.

Practical action bridge

Reader action	Typical condition	Monitoring intensity
IGNORE	Outside current scope or no active work justified	NO MONITORING
INVESTIGATE	Plausible signal but a decision-critical gap remains	RESOLVE EVIDENCE
MONITOR	Independent, decision-relevant evidence is changing	LOW-INTENSITY / TARGETED / ACTIVE
RESPOND	Buyer/serviceability evidence materially changes a current decision	Strategic action + appropriate monitoring

The practical action is a communication layer above the canonical assessment/monitoring outputs. It does not replace them.

6 - LIFECYCLE CONTROL

Reopen on evidence change - and pre-register reversal

A review trigger tells you when to look again. A reversal condition tells you what would justify downgrading or changing the action.

Useful review triggers

- Repeated deal, RFP or shortlist appearance.
- New buyer segment, product tier or geography.
- Pricing, packaging, procurement or certification change.
- Material product release, integration, partnership or channel becomes operational.
- New customer evidence, acquisition or contradiction resolution.

Counter-evidence examples

- A launch never becomes commercially serviceable.
- A hiring cluster disappears without related capability or market change.
- Buyer references remain outside the target segment.
- A partnership never becomes operational.
- Expected repeated deal appearance fails to materialize.

Monitoring has a cost

Do not increase monitoring because an entrant generates more content. Increase attention when decision relevance rises, independent evidence materially changes, or a defined trigger fires. Reduce it when the reversal condition is met.

Preserve the prior assessment and supersede it with a new dated state. Do not silently rewrite history.

7 - FIELD CHECKLIST

Before escalating an emerging competitor

- Identity is normalized and the decision scope is explicit.
- Current capability and serviceability are verified or marked unresolved.
- Buyer relevance is separated from visibility and attention.
- Repeated URLs have been collapsed to their underlying provenance.
- Trajectory evidence uses genuinely distinct signal families.
- Buyer corroboration is identified separately from public-signal corroboration.
- Evidence state is OBSERVED, INFERRED or UNRESOLVED.
- The current assessment and monitoring action are separate.
- The next evidence request is specific.
- A review trigger and at least one downgrade/reversal condition are recorded.
- AI-assisted summaries preserve sources and do not upgrade evidence state.

What this changes downstream

Use the result to decide competitor-set inclusion, monitoring effort, sales enablement, battlecard creation, positioning, product-roadmap investigation, pricing watch, market-entry assumptions, SEO/AI discovery monitoring and executive escalation. Respond only where the scoped evidence changes a real decision.

Use the Excel register for the auditable record

The final register separates identity, scope, evidence, assessment and lifecycle. The public workbook should only be treated as approved after the exact final file passes Microsoft Excel open/use/save/close/fresh-reopen with no repair or content warning.

Method boundary. This handoff evaluates a sparse-history entrant. It does not replace SERPIFAI methods for competitor-role classification, evidence reliability, contradiction handling, confidence language, multi-market scope or competitor-set update governance.