Sales and Customer Evidence Validation Guide

A practical protocol for validating whether search-discovered and analyst-proposed competitors participate in real buyer decisions.

Core principle
Public and market evidence generate candidates. Sales and customer evidence test commercial relevance. Neither source class is complete on its own.

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Version 1.0.0 · 4 August 2026

1. The decision

Competitor-set validation tests a candidate-to-view relationship. The output is not a universal competitor label. It is a scoped role with permitted use, unsupported use, next evidence, owner, version and review trigger.

Use the protocol before a competitor set shapes content, paid search, battlecards, product comparison, shortlist analysis, procurement, pricing, renewal or executive strategy.

2. Fictional composite

A software team starts with three search-visible platforms. Sales remembers a famous lost vendor, but many CRM competitor fields are blank. Buyer interviews identify an internal spreadsheet. Procurement introduces an enterprise-only supplier. One search-visible platform never appears in a real shortlist. Three records supporting the famous vendor share one lost opportunity. One candidate remains unresolved.

Signal	Finding	Validation effect
Search	Three visible platforms	Candidate set
Sales memory	One famous loss	Internal hypothesis
Buyer interviews	Internal spreadsheet	Add substitute
Procurement	Enterprise-only supplier	Enterprise/procurement view
Provenance	Three records, one deal	Do not count as independent
Absence	Visible domain never shortlisted	Retain discovery or scoped exclusion

3. Six-stage protocol

Define

Name the downstream decision, offer, buyer or buying group, job, market, geography, serviceability and stage.

Sample

Choose relevant wins, losses, no-decision, renewal, churn and procurement records; disclose missing coverage.

Normalize

Resolve parent, brand, product, tier and non-vendor alternatives.

Triangulate

Keep buyer observation, seller observation, commercial events, customer records, public evidence and derived interpretation separate.

Reconcile

Test scope, freshness, contradiction, missingness and provenance independence.

Approve, version or reopen

Publish the scoped role, permitted and prohibited use, owner, effective period and trigger.

Operating sequence
DEFINE → SAMPLE → NORMALIZE → TRIANGULATE → RECONCILE → APPROVE, VERSION OR REOPEN

4. Evidence-source map

Evidence family	Examples	Supports	Does not prove
Direct buyer observation	Interview, shortlist, RFP, buyer call	What appeared in that decision	Broad relevance by itself
Seller/internal observation	Seller interview, CRM note	Internal account and process context	Buyer rationale
Commercial event	Won, lost, no decision, POC, renewal, churn	Event, outcome and stage	Cause without supporting evidence
Customer/user record	Onboarding, support, feedback	Previous solution, workaround, substitute	Representative market frequency
Public discovery	SERP, paid overlap, directory, marketplace	Candidate and discovery/reference role	Shortlist or procurement relevance
Analyst/AI interpretation	Synthesis, theme, summary	Triage and interpretation	New independent evidence

Missing-data rule

A blank CRM field is missing data, not proof that no competitor existed.

5. Provenance and sample controls

Record count and independent-decision count answer different questions. A transcript summary and CRM note from the same call are two artifacts but one provenance. Three CRM rows from one opportunity are one underlying decision. Ten pages repeating one announcement are one public signal.

Sample coverage limited

Missing outcomes, geographies, tiers or roles restrict the conclusion.

CRM capture incomplete

Blank or inconsistent fields require other records and prospective capture.

One segment overrepresented

Enterprise, self-serve, one seller or one account may dominate.

Historical backfill unreliable

Do not convert memory into official-looking historical facts.

Prospective validation required

Create normalized, required capture going forward.

Independence test
Multiple records are not multiple independent decisions when they share one underlying buyer event.

6. Controlled outcomes

Outcome	Use it when	Role effect
CONFIRM	Matching current evidence supports the existing scoped role	Keep role
ADD	A real alternative is absent from the current scoped set	Add scoped role
DOWNGRADE	Evidence is partial, stale, mismatched or not serviceable	Limit role
RECLASSIFY	The alternative type or scoped role is wrong	Change assignment
RETAIN FOR DISCOVERY / REFERENCE	Public/channel relevance exists without commercial validation	Keep outside commercial view
EXCLUDE FROM THIS COMMERCIAL VIEW	Adequate matching evidence supports non-participation	Remove only from tested view
RESOLVE EVIDENCE	Evidence is contradictory, missing, one-sided or non-independent	No final role change
REOPEN	A trigger or new material evidence challenges a prior version	Suspend prior approval
INVALID INPUT	Required identity or controlled input is malformed, unsupported or missing	Correct input

No score

The protocol does not calculate a validation percentage, confidence level or threat score.

7. Permitted-use checklist

- ☐ What exact decision is being supported?
- ☐ Does evidence match the offer, buyer, market, geography, serviceability and stage?
- ☐ Which records are direct buyer observations and which are internal interpretations?
- ☐ How many underlying decisions exist?
- ☐ What sample or CRM capture is missing?
- ☐ What contradiction remains?
- ☐ What role changes in this view?
- ☐ Which downstream use is supported—and which is not?
- ☐ What evidence would change the result?
- ☐ Who owns the next version and what reopens it?

Commercial hard gate

CONFIRM and ADD require resolved alternative type, scoped role and serviceability where the intended use depends on actual availability.

8. Interview and record prompts

Buyer decision

- What alternatives did you seriously compare?
- What did you use before, including internal or manual methods?
- At what point did each alternative enter or leave the decision?
- Who raised procurement, security, legal or budget constraints?

Seller/internal view

- Which opportunity and stage does this account refer to?
- Is this the buyer’s statement or your interpretation?
- Which source record can another reviewer inspect?
- Does another record repeat the same underlying decision?

Lifecycle

- What happened at win, loss, no decision, renewal or churn?
- What event or date should reopen the validated role?

Interview boundary

One interview can reveal an alternative. It does not, by itself, establish representative frequency or universal relevance.

9. Review and version record

Field	Required entry
Validated set version	Stable version identifier
Candidate / competitor ID	Stable identity
Scoped role	Direct, indirect, substitute or reference/discovery
Validation outcome	One controlled outcome
Permitted use	Explicit downstream decisions
Prohibited use	Unsupported decisions
Evidence summary	Source-linked, scope-bounded summary
Owner / reviewer	Accountable person or role
Effective period	From / to or current
Review trigger	Date or event
Supersedes	Prior version or none

Versioning rule

Do not silently overwrite a validated set. Preserve the prior assignment, effective period and evidence that triggered reopening.

10. Product boundaries

This guide does not replace CRM, competitive-intelligence software, win/loss platforms, call-recording systems, customer-research systems, proprietary traffic or keyword datasets, research panels or automated monitoring. It provides no statistical confidence score, automatic ingestion or real-world outcome validation.

The browser check is local-only and asks users to use generic labels. The workbook is a lightweight operating register, not a data warehouse.

11. Source roles

The research basis includes primary CRM documentation, analyst guidance on buying journeys and buying groups, customer-research and win/loss practitioner methods, digital-competitor product documentation, procurement guidance, customer-lifecycle guidance, official research-quality methods and provenance/lifecycle frameworks.

Source family	Supports	Does not establish
CRM and opportunity documentation	Capture structures, stages and reporting fields	Complete or buyer-confirmed truth
Buying-journey and buying-group research	Nonlinear decisions and multi-role participation	One universal funnel or competitor list
Digital competitor tools	Search, audience and channel relationships	Shortlist or procurement competition
Procurement and research-quality guidance	Evaluation controls, missingness and review discipline	SERPIFAI endorsement or commercial outcomes

12. One-page handoff

Decision

What competitor-to-view relationship is being tested?

Candidate

Stable identity, product or offer and current role.

Scope

Buyer or buying group, job, market, geography, serviceability and stage.

Evidence

Public candidates plus first-party records with source relationship and provenance.

Outcome

Confirm, add, downgrade, reclassify, retain, exclude, resolve, reopen or invalid input.

Use

Explicit supported and unsupported downstream decisions.

Lifecycle

Owner, effective period, version and review trigger.

Final principle

Search and market evidence generate candidates. Sales and customer evidence test commercial relevance. A validated set preserves different roles rather than forcing one source to win.