



WHITEPAPER / NEXT BEST ACTION FOR AFTERMARKET SALES TEAMS

AI Is Transforming Aftermarket Sales Teams. The Winners Will Invest in Reps, Not Replace Them.

Despite billions of parts in circulation, the automotive aftermarket remains a “people business,” especially when it comes to the relationship between the distributor and the shop. This paper outlines how aftermarket executives can design a high-functioning sales team through a next best action framework that makes the frontline more effective today and builds the foundation for a connected, AI-enabled organization.

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4.8 hrs

Average seller time saved per week by AI, before deciding how to reinvest the capacity.

GARTNER

2.6x

More likely to grow when reps are told which account to work next, and why.

GARTNER

3–15%

More revenue from every rep you already have, when the system points them at the right accounts.

MCKINSEY

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Founder & CEO, Tromml

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SOURCES AT END OF DOCUMENT

Executive summary

FROM	Lauren McCullough, Founder & CEO, Tromml
TO	Aftermarket distribution and manufacturer executives
RE	Implementing next-best-action systems
DATE	August 2026

The automotive aftermarket has digitized the transaction, but not the relationship. Shops can increasingly find inventory, check price, and place an order online, yet trust, product knowledge, and judgment still shape where the business goes. That leaves distributors and suppliers with a hard problem: they still need strong sales teams, but those teams are expensive, the most experienced reps are retiring, and much of the customer intelligence that makes the best people effective still lives in their heads.

Next Best Action systems offer a way to get more leverage from the people already serving the customer. Instead of giving reps more data to sort through, they help answer four practical questions: who needs attention, why now, what does the rep need to know, and what should happen next. That matters because the upside is not theoretical. Sales teams using AI-enabled next best actions are 2.6x more likely to grow, and better account prioritization has been tied to 3% to 15% more revenue per rep.^{14,16}

This paper explores what it takes to build Next Best Action systems that actually work in the aftermarket: capturing frontline intelligence without adding administrative burden, combining it with transaction history, understanding the language and structure of the industry, and turning all of that context into guidance people can act on.

SEVEN KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 Technology changed how parts get ordered, not who earns the business.** Parts availability remains the number-one supplier selection factor, but independent shops are not choosing on price alone. They continue to rely on the distributors they trust to have the right part, solve problems, and deliver when it matters.¹
- 2 Organizations invested in data while the most critical knowledge stayed in people's heads.** The decisive data in this business, what a shop actually said, was never digital in the first place. There was nothing to migrate or scrape because no system ever captured it.
- 3 That disconnect between humans and data is blocking AI adoption.** Dashboards hand reps and managers numbers to sort through, not the why behind them, and sales data is a lagging indicator: the invoice says what happened weeks after the why was decided.
- 4 Reps guided toward the next best action perform better on every measurable axis.** AI-enabled sellers spend 33% more time with customers, make 18% more calls, cover 19% more accounts, close 23% larger deals, and beat quota 9 points more often than their peers.²
- 5 The same discipline extends past the field.** Counters, drivers, and customer support hold customer knowledge too. A single branch counter can field 150 to 200 calls a day, and those interactions should feed the same customer context the sales team uses.³
- 6 Managers need visibility into all of it.** They do not need hundreds of notes. They need the handful of risks, opportunities, and patterns where intervention can change the outcome.
- 7 A connected sales organization becomes an asset the rest of the company can use.** Every day customer intelligence goes uncaptured is a day of conversations the business cannot recreate later.

Relationships still run the show

Digital commerce is changing the transaction, not the relationship: distributors still need strong reps, but they must get far more leverage from each one as costs rise and institutional knowledge walks out the door.

EXHIBIT 1

The order went digital. The decision did not.

Digital channels now absorb the overwhelming majority of parts orders, yet the share of B2B buyers who buy on relationship is rising, not falling.

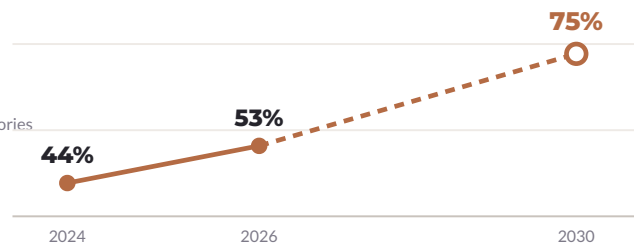
HOW THE ORDER ARRIVES



Parts availability is still the number-one supplier-selection factor for **59% of shops**.

Over **60%** call their WD first in core categories.

WHO EARNS THE BUSINESS



Share of B2B buyers who are relationship-oriented, rising to a predicted preference for human-led selling.

Sources: IMR shop tracking study, 2026; McKinsey B2B buyer research, 2026; Gartner prediction, 2030 horizon. See notes 1, 4 and 5.

Much of parts ordering has moved online, but the automotive aftermarket is still a relationship-driven industry. Shops now place roughly 82% of parts orders through a screen. Yet 53% of B2B buyers report they still buy on the strength of a relationship, up from 44% two years ago. Gartner expects that by 2030, three in four B2B buyers will want a person in the deal, not a machine.^{1,4,5}

That creates a hard reality for distributors and suppliers: they cannot simply digitize their way out of a sales-driven organization. Technology can absorb more of the transaction by making it easier to find inventory, compare options, check pricing, and place an order. But when a purchase is more expensive, technical, or consequential, the value of a trusted rep often increases. The rep is no longer needed just to take the order. They are needed to understand the account, bring the right products and opportunities forward, solve problems, and help the customer make a better decision.

Meanwhile, field sales is getting more expensive. Every rep carries pay, benefits, a truck, a manager, and support behind them, while thin margins push distributors to get more from every seat. That makes increasing the value of each rep essential.

And the timing could hardly be worse. Distribution's most experienced reps are aging out of the workforce. Modern Distribution Management calls the knowledge they take with them "tenure capital": years of judgment, pattern recognition, customer history, and decision-making instinct that often lives nowhere else. Census data cited by

MDM shows the share of wholesale-trade employment at firms where at least a quarter of workers are over 55 rose from 14% in 2000 to more than 40% in 2022. Separate research cited by MDM estimates that 42% of institutional knowledge is unique to the individual employee who holds it.⁶

Replacing the headcount is not the same as replacing the capability.

“I used to have reps that came in to do real business. These younger guys tend to come by and drop off a flyer and move on to their next stop.”

Owner, independent repair shop

A new rep can inherit a territory, but they do not automatically inherit twenty years of knowing which customer is worth the extra call, who is likely to try a new line, when a decline actually matters, or what was said in a shop six months ago.

AI-enabled sellers create more leverage per rep

AI creates value in distribution not by replacing the rep, but by increasing the leverage of every rep.

There is no easy way out of that squeeze. Cutting the sales force risks the relationships that still influence purchasing. Adding headcount makes the economics harder. So the real question becomes: **how do you get more out of the reps already carrying a territory?**

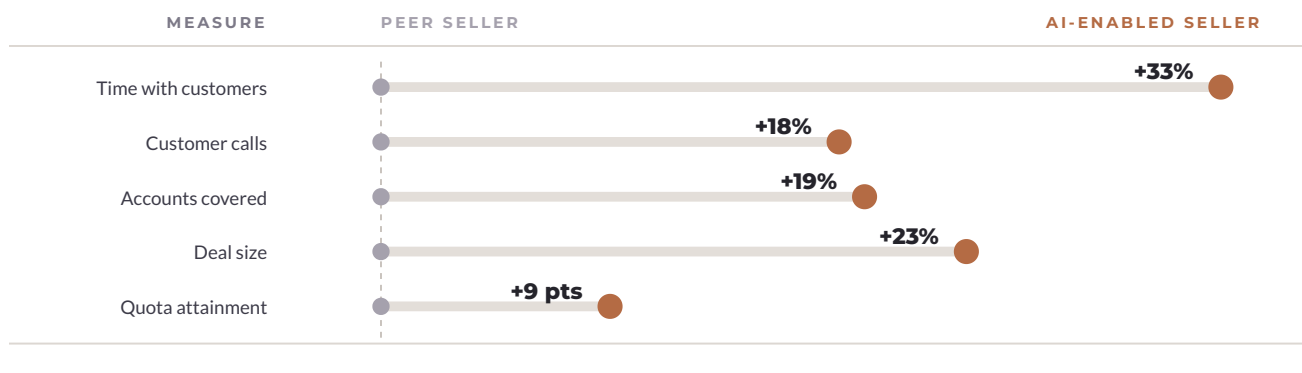
The opportunity is not to replace the rep. It is to make every rep more effective, while turning what the best people know into an asset the rest of the organization can actually use.

A well-deployed AI stack can change the economics of the rep seat and how the work gets done. Alexander Group's 2025 sales-force research found that, compared with their peers, **AI-enabled sellers spend 33% more time with customers, make 18% more calls, cover 19% more accounts, close 23% larger deals, and achieve quota attainment rates 9 points higher.** Those gains map directly to the levers that matter most in distribution: revenue, account coverage, average order value, and the ability to consistently hit the number.²

EXHIBIT 2

The same seat, measured against its peers

Every axis a distributor manages a field team on moves in the same direction. Indexed against a comparable traditional seller.



Source: Alexander Group, 2025 sales-force research. Quota attainment is expressed in percentage points; all other measures are relative differences. See note 2.

The wins here are easy to find, because so much of a rep's week goes to paperwork rather than selling. Reps spend only about **30% of the week actually selling**, and **68% say note-taking and data entry eat the most time**. The point of AI here is not automation for its own sake but handing those hours back and aiming them at the accounts where they matter.⁷

That also explains why results vary so widely. Gartner reports that **89% of AI pilots never make it past the pilot**. The one in ten that do go live **pay back well over what they cost**. The difference is not just who bought AI. It is who embedded it into the workflow in a way that actually improves how the rep works.⁸

WHAT THE LIFT IS WORTH

Percentages are easy to skim past. The same numbers, carried to the P&L.

\$2.4M – \$12M

Additional revenue on a **40-rep field team** carrying \$2 million each — the **3% to 15% more revenue per rep** McKinsey finds when analytics point the team at the right accounts, with the same headcount.¹⁶

Published third-party ranges applied to stated revenue and headcount. Not Tromml projections.

\$1.5M – \$2M

Annual EBIT improvement for a **\$200 million distributor**, from the 75 to 100 basis points Deloitte models for GenAI across sales and service. At \$1 billion, **\$7.5M to \$10M**.¹⁷

AI systems are blocked by missing context

The advantage is not access to AI. It is giving AI access to the knowledge that makes your business different.

There is a catch: AI can only work with what the business can see digitally.

Distributors already have enormous amounts of structured data. They can see what a customer bought, what they paid, what was quoted, what was returned, and whether a category is growing or shrinking.

That data is valuable, but it mostly tells the business what happened and leaves little detail behind why.

The reason why often lives somewhere else. A system may see that a shop bought fewer brake products last month. The rep may know that the shop has been complaining about fill rates, that a competitor just offered a better rebate, or that the owner is considering moving the category entirely. If that conversation never becomes data, even a sophisticated AI system is working with only part of the story.

More is missing than most leaders assume. IDC puts roughly **80% of company data** in the messy pile of calls, emails, notes, and recordings, with around **90%** of that material never analyzed. In distribution, that pile is anything but junk. It is where the reasons behind the numbers live.⁹

The harder problem is that the system meant to hold customer context is often the thinnest system in the business. Validity’s 2025 survey of 602 CRM users and administrators found that **76% of organizations say less than half their CRM data is accurate and complete**, and **37% reported losing revenue directly because of poor data quality**. That gap has a mundane cause: the record depends on someone stopping selling long enough to type.¹¹

The people closest to the customer are the least able to pay that tax. Reps already name note-taking and data entry as their most time-consuming work. Every field skipped at six o’clock on a Thursday is context the business will not have on Monday, and it does not come back.⁷

EXHIBIT 3

One account, two halves — and only one of them is in the system

The structured record explains what changed. The half that explains why it changed was never digital to begin with.

MIDTOWN AUTOBRAKE CATEGORY · LAST 60 DAYS

IN THE SYSTEM TODAY

Structured · queryable · lagging

■ Brake revenue down 22%

■ 11 open quotes, none followed up

■ Last order 14 days ago

■ Return rate up 3 pts

NEVER CAPTURED

Spoken · unstructured · leading

🗣️ “Third short shipment in six weeks.”

🗣️ “They came in with a better rebate.”

🗣️ “We’re looking at moving the category.”

🗣️ “We just picked up a fleet contract.”

The invoice tells you what happened. The conversation tells you why.

By the time the decline reaches the P&L, the decision that caused it is weeks old.

Illustrative account composed from recurring aftermarket workflows. See methodology.

This is what separates an AI pilot from an AI system that pays. Gartner found the companies that make it work spend **up to four times more** on the dull parts: clean data, clear rules, trained people, and the slog of changing how a team operates. They also work at getting what their people know into the system. The ones furthest along get **up to 65% more out of what they build**, not from a smarter model but from a fuller picture of the business.¹⁰

Gartner’s conclusion is blunt: AI success is becoming less about better models and more about giving AI governed, contextual access to the right data.¹⁰

The inverse is just as telling. Gartner predicts that through 2026, organizations will abandon **60% of AI projects** unsupported by AI-ready data.¹²

McKinsey makes the same point: the next gains lean on the messy material of customer conversations, emails, call recordings, and notes, and scanning it in is not enough. It has to be tied to the account, the part, and the order before a machine can use it. **More than two-thirds of high-performing companies still name data as the main thing holding AI back.**¹³

DISTRIBUTION ANALOGUE

As Graybar leaned into AI, leadership cleaned and standardized its own data first. Its early wins were in sales and service: suggesting the next part to sell and helping put quotes together.²²

The next unlock is not just adding another model. It is turning what the field knows into data the business can actually use.

Once a conversation is written down properly, it stops leaving with the rep who heard it. It can be tied to order history, read across accounts, used to steer the next move, and fed back once you see how it turned out.

That creates the beginnings of a learning loop: every interaction adds context to the customer, every outcome adds evidence, and the system has more to learn from tomorrow than it did today.

Why most capture tools fail

Any system that intends to turn frontline knowledge into action has to survive these four realities.

01

The most valuable context is not already digital.

There is nothing to scrape or migrate if the insight only existed in a conversation. If it is not captured when it is spoken, it often disappears.

02

The workflow cannot absorb more admin.

A rep already spending too little time selling is not going to become a better documentarian just because the company bought AI.

03

Experience leaves faster than it gets transferred.

Veterans know what matters almost instinctively. New hires inherit the territory, but not the judgment, customer history, or pattern recognition behind it.

04

The system has to give value back to the rep.

CRM scar tissue is real. Sales teams have lived through tools that created more typing for them and more visibility for management. Adoption changes when the rep gets something useful back immediately.

Every day that customer knowledge goes uncaptured is another day the business loses data it can never recreate.

The shift is from recording data to acting on it

For decades, sales technology has been built around the **system of record**. CRM gave companies a place to store accounts, contacts, opportunities, activities, and pipeline. That visibility mattered, but the model had a structural limitation: it was only as useful as what someone had time to enter and what someone else had time to pull back out.

At worst, CRM became an expensive filing cabinet: good at holding the past, poor at telling anyone what to do next. Salesforce found that only **35% of salespeople fully trust their own company’s data**. Systems of record still matter. But **writing something down and acting on it are two different jobs.**⁷

The four questions

AI is creating a different operating model for sales technology. Instead of asking only:

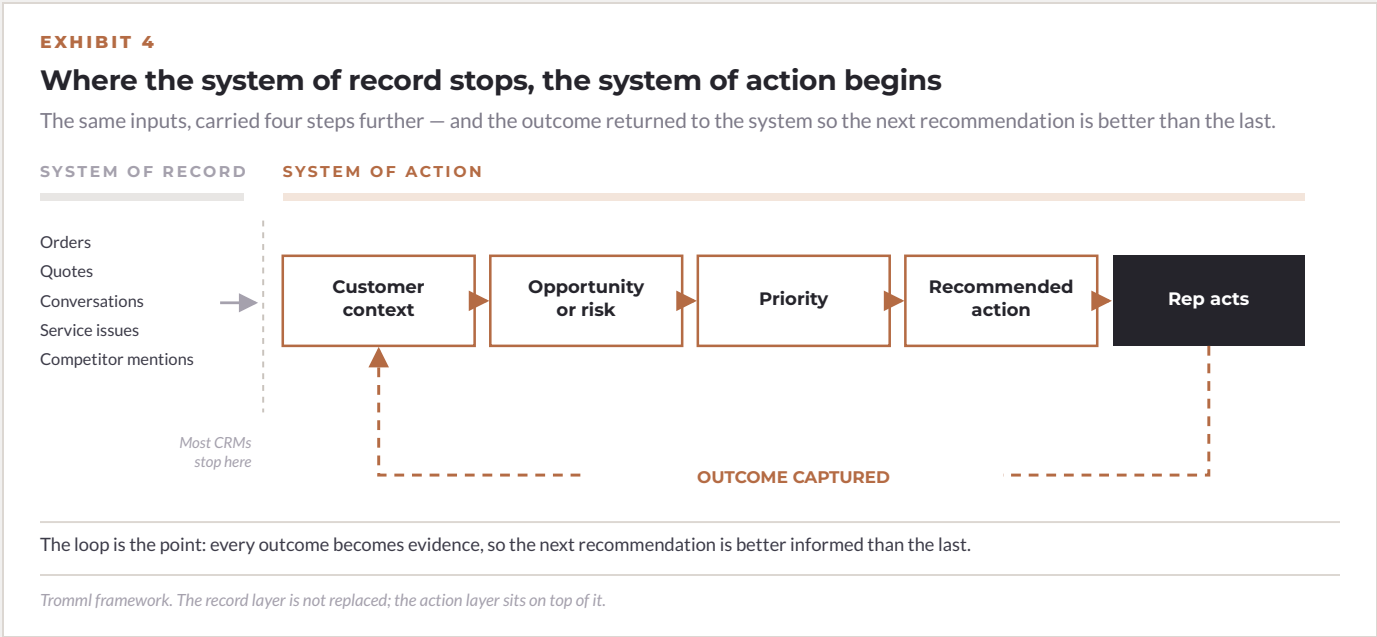
What happened in this account?

the system can begin asking:

Who needs attention? Why now? What should the seller know? What should happen next?

That is the idea behind **Next Best Action**. The system watches what customers do and say, weighs it against the account’s history, decides what matters most today, and tells the rep the one move most likely to help.

Instead of asking the rep to search dashboards, sort spreadsheets, remember 200 accounts, and decide where to start, the system does the first layer of reasoning for them.



2.6x

More likely to grow when reps are told which account to work next, and why¹⁴

>20%

Of a year's sales — the new pipeline one manufacturer opened by letting AI pick which parts and service accounts to chase¹⁵

3–15%

More revenue per rep where the system points the team at the right accounts¹⁶

The payoff is showing up in the numbers. Gartner found that sales teams whose sellers get **AI-enabled next best actions are 2.6x more likely to grow**. McKinsey tracked an equipment maker that used AI to spot parts and service openings, predict what would need work, and tell reps which accounts to call. The new pipeline it opened was worth more than a fifth of the company's annual sales.^{14,15}

The value is not another dashboard. It is better allocation of human attention.

The rep's Monday morning

Imagine a rep starting Monday morning with 250 accounts in a territory. Today, deciding where to focus may depend on memory, a manager's request, a spreadsheet, yesterday's fire, or whoever happened to call last.

A system of action changes the starting point. Instead of a customer list, the rep gets a **ranked queue with a reason behind every name**.

EXHIBIT 5

Monday morning, 250 accounts, four decisions already made

The queue a rep opens instead of a customer list. Every row carries the signal, the context behind it, and the move it implies.

RANK	ACCOUNT	WHY NOW	WHAT THE REP SHOULD KNOW	NEXT MOVE
1	Midtown Auto	Brake revenue down 22%	Three recent fill-rate complaints; competitor rebate mentioned	Address availability before discussing price
2	Apex Fleet	Fleet demand accelerating	New contractor work; interest in premium rotors	Bring fleet pricing and premium brake option
3	Southside Repair	11 open quotes	No follow-up logged; two quotes are high value	Resolve the highest-value quotes before noon
4	Hillside Garage	Category at risk	Competitor line mentioned twice recently	Understand what changed and protect the category

Illustrative queue composed from recurring aftermarket workflows. Account names are examples. See methodology.

That is a different thing from handing a rep another dashboard. The system brings the signal to them, ties it to the account, and says why it matters.

McKinsey finds that weaker B2B sales teams can spend **more than half their selling time on customers worth 20% or less of revenue**. Teams that use analytics to point reps at the right accounts get **3% to 15% more revenue per rep, and cut what it costs to serve them by 10% to 20%**.¹⁶

EXHIBIT 6

Where the week actually goes

Share of selling time spent on the lowest-value accounts



Share of revenue those same accounts produce



Source: McKinsey B2B sales productivity research. See note 16.

The problem was never simply that reps needed more information. They needed help deciding where their limited attention would create the most value.

Frictionless capture is the unlock

The system only gets smarter if the rep can feed it what they know without creating more work.

Most sales systems still depend on the rep stopping after the customer interaction, opening the CRM, finding the right account, choosing the right fields, typing a summary, and remembering what should be followed up later.

That is exactly the behavior most organizations struggle to get consistently.

At Tromml, we have taken the opposite approach: **start with what reps already do well, which is talk**. A rep can leave a shop, tap one button, and explain what happened in their own words. The system handles the harder administrative work underneath: identifying the account, products, competitors, commitments, opportunities, risks, and follow-ups, and turning the conversation into structured intelligence.

Across Tromml client deployments, we have seen reps capture **3-5x more notes**, with those notes running roughly **3-7x longer**. The point is not that longer notes are inherently better. It is that when the friction disappears, substantially more of what the rep actually knows makes it into the system.³

The adoption worry runs backwards

Leaders usually expect reps to resist being recorded. In practice, the resistance was never to talking. It was to forms. Nobody took a sales job to spend the evening typing into a form, and no amount of training is going to change that.

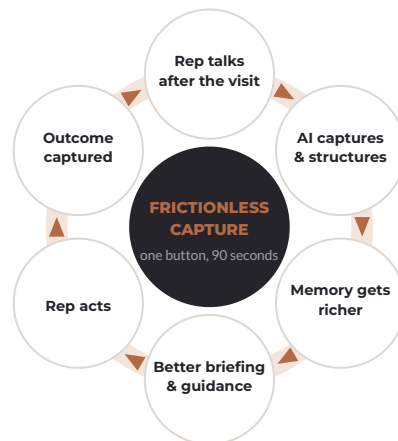
Give a rep a button and their own words, and the system is finally asking them to do the thing they are already best at. At Tromml, our top users are often the most senior people on the team, because they know the most and type the least.

That changes everything downstream. Better capture means richer account history, and richer history means a sharper call on where to go next.

EXHIBIT 7

The loop only turns if the first step is nearly free

Every stage downstream depends on capture actually happening. Voice is the entry point that makes the rest of the loop possible.



WHAT EACH TURN ADDS

- A visit that would otherwise go unwritten
- Accounts, products and competitors resolved
- Customer history the next person inherits
- A sharper briefing before the next stop
- An order or quote, with the reason attached
- Evidence that improves the next recommendation

Every interaction adds context.

Tromml framework. Capture rates reflect observed client deployments; see methodology.

From the field: capture before you forget

In AI workshops, I often give people a simple exercise after a conference: do not wait until Monday and try to reconstruct everything from business cards and half-remembered conversations. Open a voice note on the walk back to the hotel and talk for twenty minutes. Who did you meet? What did they care about? What did you promise? What surprised you? AI can organize that stream of thought remarkably well.

That works for an individual. The limitation is that the intelligence still usually stops with the individual. The real unlock is when that same frictionless capture becomes part of the company's operating system, so what one rep learns can improve the next interaction across the team.

FROM TROMML FIELD WORK

What a trade show actually costs

Suppliers know this problem better than anyone. A single trade show can run **\$20,000 to \$40,000** once travel, booth, and staff time are counted, and most of what the team learns walks out the door with them, scattered across business cards, half-remembered conversations, and three different people's phones.

One team we worked with captured roughly **250 voice notes** across a single show, using this same walk-back-to-the-hotel habit at scale. When we structured and analyzed the notes, they surfaced roughly **\$9M in pipeline** that would otherwise have lived in pockets and business cards, never reaching anyone who could act on it.

The show already produces the signal. Most organizations simply never capture it. Tromml field research; see methodology.³

What's working. One rep is consistently converting a certain opportunity. Another is recovering declining accounts. A particular talk track or product combination is working and can be coached across the team.

A CRM asks the team to document the work. A system of action uses that intelligence to improve the next piece of work.

What this looks like in Minecart

This is how **Minecart** works. It takes what reps already do and turns it into something the whole team can use: catch the conversation, sort it out, tie it to the right account and parts, surface what needs doing, then learn from how it turns out.

For the rep, that means less time documenting and more useful context before the next call. For the manager, it means seeing the handful of accounts, opportunities, and coaching moments that actually need attention. For the counter, it means inheriting the same customer context instead of starting from zero.

Minecart is not simply a better place to store notes. **It becomes more useful as the team’s own intelligence grows.**

The counter expands the value of the system

The field rep gets the long conversation. The counter gets the volume. Both are serving the same customer.

150–200

Calls a day on a professional line, in Tromml distributor field work³

18.1%

Of independent-shop parts orders are still placed by phone nationally¹

1 in 5

Orders arriving through the channel with the least captured intelligence

Some of the busiest customer contact in distribution happens at the counter. In our work with distributors, a professional line routinely takes **150 to 200 calls a day** from shops. IMR’s 2026 survey of 500 shops found **18.1% of parts orders still go in by phone**, and plenty of distributors run higher than that, especially in the technical lines, where the wrong part is expensive.^{1,3}

Those calls are not just service events. The counter is often functioning as inside sales, whether the organization calls it that or not.

A shop calls asking where the driver is. The transaction-only answer is an ETA. The higher-value interaction may be: **“While that truck is still headed your way, do you want me to add your normal stock order?”**

A customer calls for a transmission. The real job may be understanding the vehicle, intended use, power level, and what has already been changed, then recognizing the need for a converter, cooler, install kit, fluid, or specialist follow-up.

A shop asks for a control arm. The better question may reveal that they are rebuilding the entire front end, prefer a premium line, have had fitment problems with another brand, or need everything today to finish the job.

EXHIBIT 9

The same call, answered two ways

The difference is not effort or scripting. It is whether the person answering has the account's context in front of them.

THE INBOUND CALL	TRANSACTION-ONLY RESPONSE	HIGHER-VALUE RESPONSE
"Where is my driver?"	Give the ETA	"Anything else you want on the truck before it gets there?"
"Do you have this rotor?"	Check stock and price	"Is this for the fleet work you mentioned? Do you want the premium option too?"
"Will this transmission fit?"	Confirm application	"What are you building, and what else has been changed?"
"You shorted me again."	Fix the order	"Has this happened on anything else? Let's make sure we solve the pattern."

The point is not to turn the counter into a scripted call center. It is to give the person answering the phone enough customer context to recognize when there is a better question to ask.

Deloitte points at the counter directly. AI can hand the person on the phone the account history, help them find a part or a substitute, sum up an open issue, speed a quote, and spot the same complaint turning up across calls.¹⁷

Critical insights live in your call data

The counter also hears signals the rest of the sales organization may not see until much later:

"Your fill rate has been terrible this month."

"We have been buying that line somewhere else."

"That is the third one that did not fit."

"We just picked up a new fleet account."

"If you cannot get this here by tomorrow, I am moving the job."

On its own, no one of those is worth stopping to write down. Said fifty times across a month of calls, they are an early warning.

The call is often the smoke detector. The P&L is the fire report.

The counter may hear the complaint before the revenue decline. It may hear the competitor's name before share shifts. It may learn about a new fleet opportunity before purchasing history reflects it.

That information should flow both ways. The next counterperson should know what the field rep promised. The rep should know what the counter heard all week. A service issue can then become a coordinated recovery, an inbound question can become an opportunity, and the customer does not have to repeat the same story to three different

people.

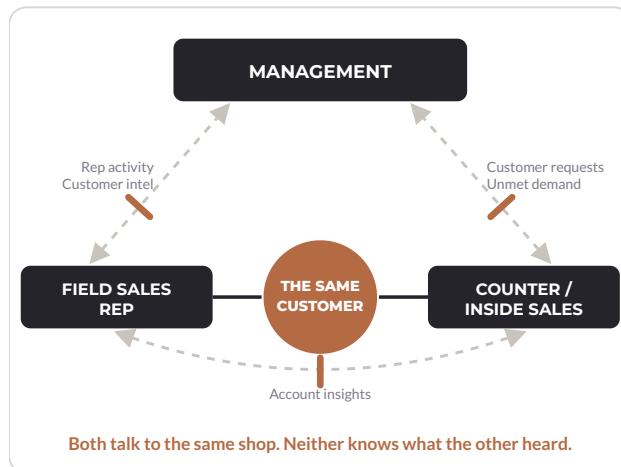
For management, the same connectivity creates visibility across both channels. Leaders can see where accounts are at risk, where opportunities are emerging, where complaints are clustering, and where the team needs coaching without waiting for the issue to hit the books.

EXHIBIT 10

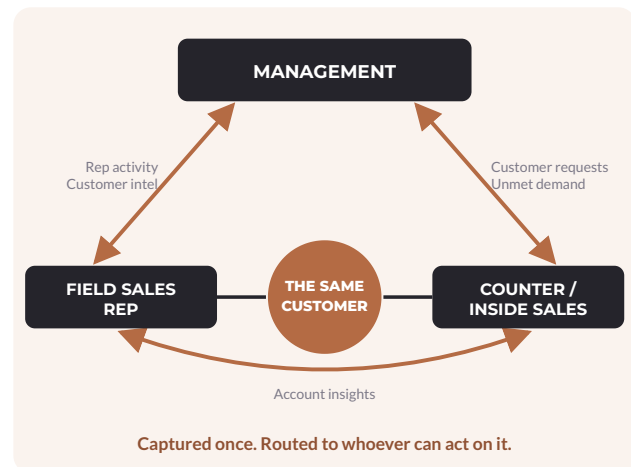
The disconnect is not with the customer. It is between the people serving them.

Both channels talk to the same shop every week. What breaks is the link between them — and the link to the manager who could act on either one.

TODAY



WITH A SHARED SYSTEM



Tromml framework. The solid centre links never change — both channels always talk to the customer. Only the sharing breaks.

Systems build a compounding advantage

Once those interactions are captured in one system, the value begins to compound. One rep learns that a shop has picked up a new fleet account. The next counter call can recognize that opportunity. A quote converts or stalls, and that outcome teaches the system which signal mattered. A competitor mention appears across six accounts, and management sees the pattern before it becomes a regional revenue problem.

Each interaction adds context. Each action creates an outcome. Each outcome makes future guidance more informed.

Capture → structure → guide → act → learn → improve.

That is the core Minecart idea. Not AI bolted onto a CRM, but a system that learns the customer relationship, giving the rep something useful the same day, and slowly turning what the field knows into something the company owns.

The model can be horizontal. The context cannot be.

A transcript summary is not the same thing as a commercially useful recommendation.

None of this works particularly well if the system does not understand the language and structure of the industry it is trying to support. A general-purpose model can summarize a rep’s Tuesday. That does not mean it understands why **line, dating, program group, fill rate, fitment, kit, or a private-label SKU** changes the commercial decision.

You do not need to build your own AI model. You need one that speaks the trade. It has to know that a line is a brand you can win or lose, that a kit is five parts sold as one, and that the same rotor sits under four part numbers. It has to know what a rep does on a Tuesday, and what a shop is really asking when it calls the counter.¹⁸

EXHIBIT 11	
The same words, understood two different ways	
Every row is language a rep uses without thinking. What separates the two columns is whether the system knows what those words mean commercially.	
GENERIC OUTPUT	DOMAIN-AWARE OUTPUT
“Line” is treated as a generic product reference	Supplier or brand line is mapped to the right account and category context
Rebate or dating language stays generic	Program terms, timing, and commercial implications are recognized
SKU strings remain opaque	Products are resolved across brand, private-label, kit, and cross-reference structures
A call becomes a transcript summary	Accounts, products, competitors, commitments, risks, and follow-ups become structured intelligence
Coaching sounds like sales 101	Guidance reflects account history, category economics, fitment, and the rep’s actual workflow
Auto Care Association data standards — ACES, PIES, PCdb and the Brand Table, which alone covers more than 28,000 brands — indicate how much structure the domain carries. See note 18.	

This is also the practical difference between an aftermarket system and the general-purpose conversation-intelligence tools built for enterprise software sales. Those tools transcribe a call and summarize it well. They were not built to know that a *line* is a supplier relationship worth defending, that *dating* changes when the invoice comes due, or that “the third one that didn’t fit” is a fitment pattern on a specific part and application that has now appeared at three accounts. That is not a model limitation. It is a context limitation, and context is the part that has to be built for the industry.

EXHIBIT 12

One sentence from a shop visit, read by two systems

A general model hears words it cannot price. An aftermarket-aware system resolves the same words into accounts, products, programs and risk.

WHAT THE REP SAID

"They're moving the Bosch line, dating got pushed to March, and that's the third one that didn't fit."

GENERIC MODEL

"the Bosch line"

unresolved

"dating pushed to March"

unresolved

"third one that didn't fit"

unresolved

OUTPUT

Customer discussed product lines, a scheduling change, and a returned part.

A summary. Nothing anyone can act on.

AFTERMARKET-AWARE SYSTEM

Bosch line

— Brand line · category share · account at risk

Dating to March

— Program terms · payment timing · margin impact

Third one that didn't fit

— Fitment issue · part and application · 3rd occurrence

OUTPUT

Account flagged at risk. Quality ticket opened on the part. Rep briefed before the next visit.

An action, with an owner and a reason.

The model can be horizontal. The context cannot be.

Illustrative sentence composed from recurring aftermarket workflows. See methodology.

Menlo Ventures put enterprise spending on industry-specific AI at **\$3.5 billion in 2025, nearly three times 2024**. Companies are buying AI built around a job, not a general model they have to teach their business from scratch.¹⁹

Vertical software does not win because the model underneath is smarter. It wins because it starts closer to the job. The words, the parts, the relationships and the way the work actually runs are already built in, instead of being one more project for the distributor to fund.

Domain context is what turns an answer into something a rep can actually use.

Once the rep, the counter and the manager are all working from the same memory, this stops being about single sales calls. That is where the next layer starts: what a connected company can do with what the frontline already knows.

SECTION THREE / ONE CUSTOMER TRUTH, MANY LENSES

Capture once. Use the context everywhere it changes a decision.

The value of captured customer intelligence should not stop with the sales team.

When I teach AI workshops, I sometimes describe business data as a mug sitting in the middle of the table. Everyone is looking at the same mug, but through a different lens.

Sales sees a deal. Support sees an open problem. Product sees a part that keeps coming back. Marketing hears the words customers really use. The boss sees something that could move the forecast. And the analyst sees a table that finally joins to orders, margin and stock.

The organization does not need six different versions of the customer. It needs one trusted source of context that each function can view through its own lens.



The same conversation can trigger very different actions

Consider what can be hidden inside a single customer conversation:

“That is the third one of these we have had come back. We have another truck on the lift, but if this one does the same thing, we are going back to the other brand.”

For the rep, that is an account about to walk. For support, it is a customer to call back today. For the supplier, three of the same complaint is a quality problem worth opening. For purchasing, it is a reason to think again about how deep to stock that part. For marketing, the words the shop used may show the product is being sold on the wrong promise. For the boss, the only question that matters is whether this is one angry shop or the front edge of a pattern.

Historically, each of those functions would have to discover the problem independently, usually after it became large enough to appear in a report. Once the conversation becomes structured data, the system can route the same signal to the people who need to act.

Deloitte sees the same opening across wholesale distribution. What a customer says can turn into account insight, a sales action, help on a quote or an order, a flagged problem, or a pattern nobody had spotted. Deloitte is blunt about the catch: none of it works until the data underneath is in order.¹⁷



From insight to action

This is where AI becomes more than a search box. A captured signal can create an action.

The customer says: *"That is the third one that did not fit."* What follows should not depend on whether one person remembered to write it down.

WHAT ONE CAPTURED SENTENCE SHOULD SET IN MOTION

- Connect** the comment to the customer, product, SKU, vehicle or application, and prior complaints.
- Detect** similar comments across other accounts, territories, and time.
- Create or recommend** a quality ticket.
- Route it** to the appropriate product or supplier contact.
- Alert the field rep** that an important customer is at risk.
- Give the next counterperson** the context before the customer calls again.

With the right rules and permissions, agents can take part of the load: writing up the case, pulling the history, drafting the reply, or making sure the job does not die in someone's queue.

The goal is not simply to know more. It is to shorten the distance between signal and response.

From what to why

Executives shouldn't have to wait for a report to understand the business. The system should put the answers, and the evidence behind them, at their fingertips.

A CEO can already ask a dashboard: "Which category is down?" But the questions that actually dictate strategy are harder: *Why is it down? What are customers saying? Is this price, availability, product quality, competition, or execution? Where is it happening? When did we first start hearing about it?*

Answering that used to mean pulling reports, calling regional managers, reading through thousands of notes, and piecing the story together by hand.

A system of action flips that. With conversations sitting next to sales data, a leader can start with the pattern and click straight down to the proof. Nobody has to rebuild the story from scratch.

Every insight needs a receipt

An AI answer is only as good as the evidence that supports it.

The danger in creating a "company brain" is treating a large language model like an oracle. You cannot just dump thousands of transcripts, notes, and transactions into an LLM, ask "What is happening in my business?" and assume the answer is right. It may sound right while missing important context, connecting things that are not actually related, or giving too much weight to a handful of conversations.

The hard part is making sure the system understands what the information actually means: which customer it belongs to, what product or line was involved, when it happened, what else was going on in the account, and what happened next. Otherwise, you have given the model more information, but not necessarily more understanding. The goal is not to throw more data at AI. It is to give it enough structure and context to produce an answer you can actually trust and act on.

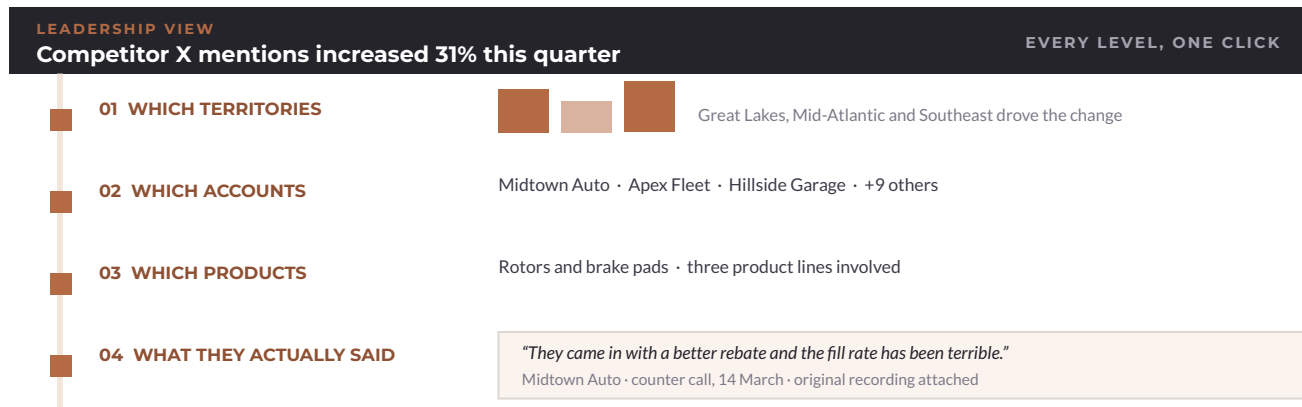
Gartner warned in 2026 that AI agents go wrong when they do not know how a business actually fits together: what links to what, and which rules apply. That is why we keep the trail. If you cannot see where a fact came from, you cannot check it, and you should not bet on it.^{20,21}

Our principle is simple: if the system surfaces an insight, you should be able to get back to the evidence.

EXHIBIT 15

A leadership view, and the four clicks back to the shop that said it

The summary provides the speed. The source provides the defensibility.



A generated observation becomes a strategic decision at the point it can be traced back to a named account and a real sentence.

Tromml framework. Illustrative drill-down; account names are examples.

A leadership view might say: "Competitor X came up 31% more this quarter." One click should show which territories drove it, which accounts said it, which lines were involved, and the words the customer actually used.

The summary provides the speed, but the source provides the defensibility. That transparency is what turns a generated observation into a strategic decision.

What this looks like in Tromml Lenses

This is the idea behind the role-based views we are building with **Tromml Lenses**. The underlying customer intelligence does not change. The lens does. A sales leader does not need to see the same thing as someone in product, marketing, or customer support, even when they are all working from the same customer conversation. Sales may see an account at risk. Product may see a fitment issue appearing across multiple customers. Marketing may hear the language shops are using to describe the problem. Leadership may see the beginning of a larger trend.

The goal is not to create six different versions of the customer or six different AI systems. **It is to capture the intelligence once, structure it correctly, and let each person see the part that matters to the decision they are responsible for making.** Because every lens works from the same underlying record, the answer can always lead back to the same evidence: the customer, the product, the transaction, and ultimately what was actually said. That is what makes the intelligence useful across the organization without losing the context that made it valuable in the first place.

EXHIBIT 16

What each lens needs from the same record

ROLE	WHAT THE LENS SURFACES
Sales leadership	Risks, opportunities, rep execution, and coaching signals
Customer support	Unresolved problems, commitments, recurring issues, and account history
Product and quality	Recurring complaints, fitment issues, return patterns, and the specific products being discussed
Marketing	Voice-of-customer language: how shops describe the problem, what terminology resonates, what competitors are being compared, and why customers say they buy
Executives	Patterns, changes, emerging risks, and the ability to drill from the conclusion back to the evidence
Analysts	The structured underlying data, joinable to everything else the business already measures

Tromml Lenses. One captured record, six role-based views.

A conversation can become a record the business can search: the account, the part, the brand, the competitor named, the promise made, the date, what happened next, and a link back to what was actually said. An analyst can line that up against sales, margin, returns or stock and ask questions we never thought of.

The point is not to replace analysts; it is to hand them a dataset they never had before.

The intelligence created from a company's customer relationships should remain useful outside the application that captured it.

The software earns its keep by doing the hard part: catching what was said, working out what it refers to, and tying it to the rest of the business. What comes out should belong to the company and work anywhere its data works.

The loop gets bigger across the enterprise

In the sales organization, the loop looked like this:

Capture → structure → guide → act → learn.

Across the enterprise, the loop becomes larger:

Capture → structure → connect → route → act → measure → learn → share.

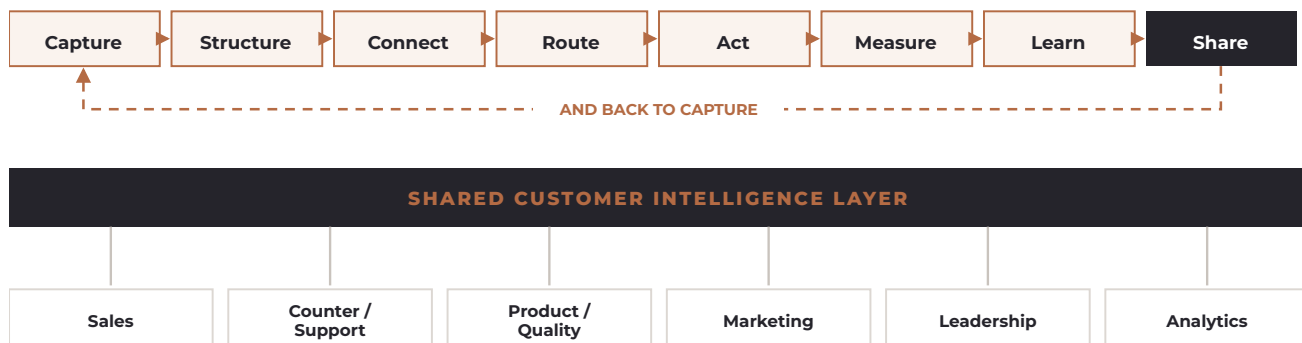
A rep's note sharpens the next sales call. A counter call warns the rep. Six complaints open a product investigation. Twenty conversations change what marketing says. A fix that worked becomes proof of what to try next time. An analyst ties it to returns and finds something nobody thought to look for. And the CEO sees it coming before the board does.

Every one of those outcomes creates more context for the next decision.

EXHIBIT 17

The enterprise loop, and the six functions drawing on it

Every step remains traceable to the conversation and the business data that produced it.



Frontline conversations stop being disposable moments and become reusable organizational intelligence — structured enough for AI, accessible enough for analysts, and traceable enough for leadership.

Tromml framework.

Frontline conversations stop being disposable moments and become reusable organizational intelligence.

The goal is not another data silo, and not another chatbot. It is one trusted picture of the customer: clean enough for AI to use, open enough for an analyst to dig into, traceable enough for the boss to trust, and useful enough to change what people do.

The company brain is not the model. It is the accumulated context the organization can finally remember, connect, and act on.

SECTION FOUR / SHAPING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

AI will not replace the distributor workforce. It will change what each person is responsible for.

It will raise the value of judgment, context, and coordination — the parts of the job that were never the bottleneck in the first place.

It is worth ending with a practical question:

If it is 2035 and you are running a 300-location distributor, what does the team actually look like?

Not smaller everywhere. Not run by robots. And not built around people who spend the day chasing information, re-typing notes, or passing the same customer problem from one desk to the next.

The likely future is a workforce where more of the repetitive work is absorbed by systems, while more of the human work shifts toward judgment, relationships, exception handling, and coordination.

In that world, the sales rep does less account triage and more account strategy. The counter spends less time answering the same low-value questions and more time guiding the customer, spotting patterns, and capturing signals. The manager spends less time collecting status and more time coaching, intervening, and allocating resources. Customer support becomes less of a ticket queue and more of an orchestrator across service, sales, and product. Leadership spends less time trying to reconstruct what is happening and more time responding to it with confidence.

EXHIBIT 18

What changes by role

ROLE	WHAT CHANGES
Field sales rep	Less time deciding where to go, preparing from scratch, and logging notes later. More time deepening relationships, handling complex accounts, and acting on prioritized opportunities.
Counter / inside sales	Less time acting as a reactive order desk. More time using context to ask better questions, catch issues early, protect accounts, and generate additional value during the call.
Sales manager	Less time collecting activity and reading notes. More time coaching from evidence, spotting patterns across the team, and intervening where it changes the outcome.
Customer support	Less time manually sorting issues and chasing background. More time resolving complex problems, coordinating action, and improving the customer experience across channels.
Product / quality	Less dependence on anecdotal escalation. More direct visibility into recurring complaints, fitment issues, and real-world voice of customer.
Marketing	Less guesswork about messaging. More access to the language customers actually use, the objections they raise, and the comparisons they make.
Leadership	Less dashboard archaeology. More ability to ask why, trace patterns to the source, and make decisions with the real language of the business behind the numbers.
Analysts / BI	Less time hunting for missing context. More access to structured, AI-ready frontline data that can be joined to sales, margin, returns, inventory, and service metrics.

The job does not disappear. The center of gravity changes.

That is the real point: the rep, the counter, and the manager are all still there, but the nature of the work shifts upward. The counter becomes more consultative, the rep more strategic, the manager more of a coach and operator. Support becomes more proactive, and analysts become more powerful because the “why” behind the numbers is finally available in a usable format.

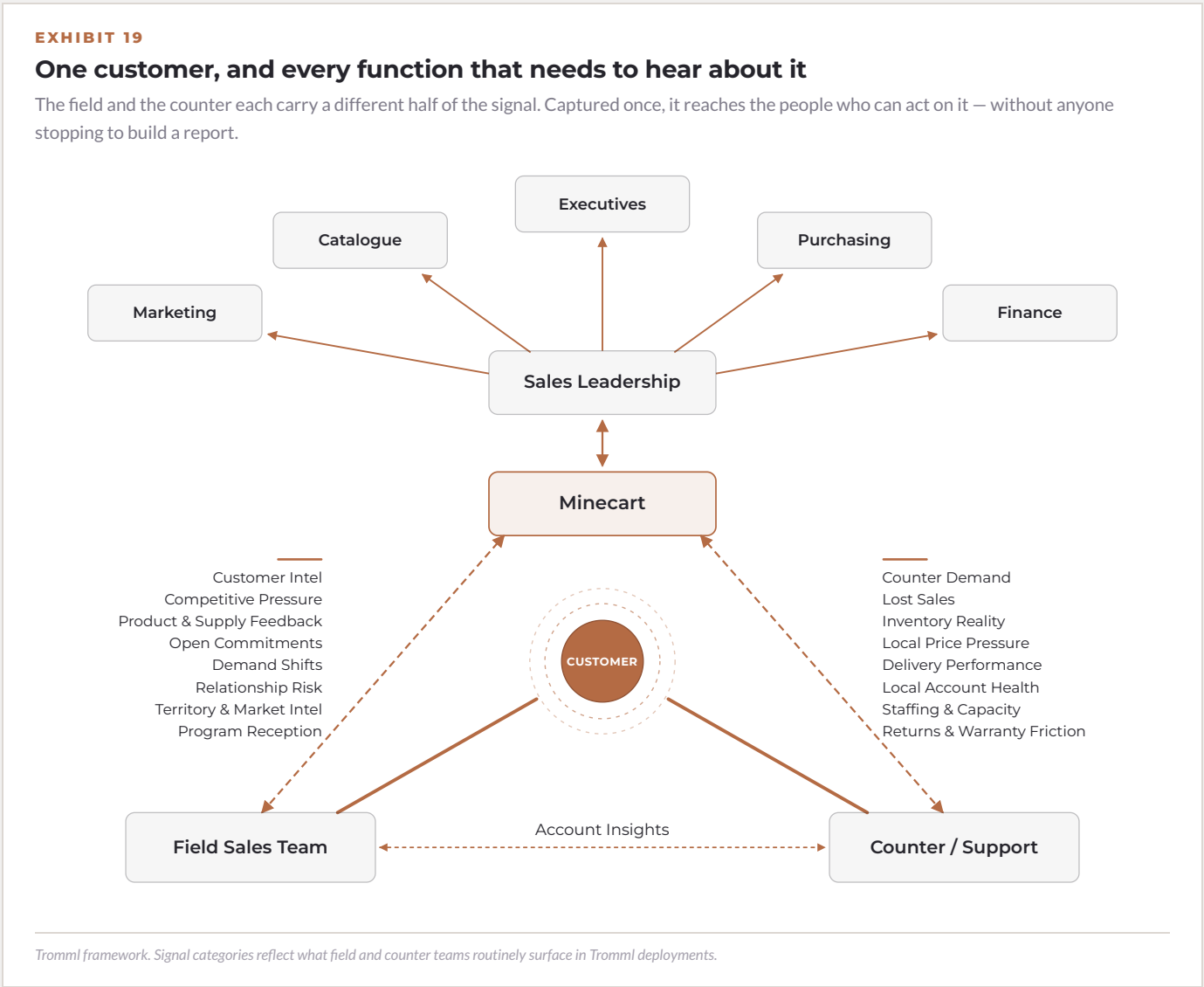
What disappears is not the person. It is the wasted motion around the person.

In many ways, the distributor of 2035 will still look familiar on the org chart. It will still have field sales, counter teams, support teams, managers, product specialists, marketers, analysts, and executives. What changes is that they are no longer operating as separate memory systems. They are working from the same customer truth.

The emerging shape of the organization

That means the organization can start behaving less like a set of disconnected departments and more like a coordinated commercial system.

A customer tells the counter about a fitment issue. The rep sees it before the next visit. Product sees it before returns spike. Marketing sees how the customer described the problem. Leadership sees whether it is isolated or systemic. The analyst can connect it to the broader business.



That is not a different workforce because AI removed people. It is a different workforce because AI made the people more connected, more informed, and more capable.

EXHIBIT 20

The 2035 distributor workforce

Same org chart. Same people. The difference is what each of them is spending the day doing, and that they are all working from one record.

300 LOCATIONS · ONE SHARED CUSTOMER TRUTH

Captured at the frontline, structured once, available to every function

Field sales rep

Territory triage → **account strategy**

Counter / inside sales

Order desk → **consultative guide**

Sales manager

Status collection → **coaching and intervention**

Customer support

Ticket queue → **orchestrated response**

Product / quality

Anecdotal escalation → **recurring signal**

Marketing

Guesswork → **voice of customer**

Leadership

Dashboard archaeology → **asking why**

Analysts / BI

Hunting for context → **structured, joinable data**

Same people. More leverage. Shared customer truth.

Tromml framework. AI removes wasted motion, not the value of the people doing the work.

What this means for distributors

The companies that win will not necessarily be the ones with the fewest people. They will be the ones where each person is operating with more leverage.

The rep will cover more accounts without becoming superficial. The counter will turn more inbound conversations into value. The manager will coach from patterns, not anecdotes. Leadership will see sooner and act faster. And the organization as a whole will get better at learning from itself.

The future workforce is not built around who can type the fastest or remember the most. It is built around who can use shared intelligence to make better decisions, solve problems faster, and create more value in every customer interaction.

Final thought



See your own accounts inside Minecart.

Your reps and your counter had a few hundred customer conversations last week. Most of what was said in them is already gone.

Minecart captures them. A rep talks for ninety seconds after a stop. The system resolves the account and the products, catches the competitor that came up, records what was promised, and flags what is at risk. The rep opens a ranked list instead of a customer list. The manager sees the handful of accounts that need a decision instead of two hundred notes.

Run it against a slice of your own data — your territories, your lines, your accounts — and see what is already sitting in conversations your team has had.

[Get a Free Analysis →](#)

Tromml builds the customer-intelligence layer for automotive aftermarket distributors, suppliers, and rep agencies — capturing what the frontline learns and turning it into the context that makes AI useful. Minecart is the field and counter capture system; Tromml Lenses are the role-based views built on top of it.

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Sources and methodology

METHODOLOGY

External statistics and case examples in this paper were reviewed against publicly available sources in August 2026. Where possible, Tromml cites original research publishers, company disclosures, industry associations, and primary data sources rather than secondary summaries.

Tromml field observations are deliberately separated from third-party benchmarks. They are drawn from de-identified conversations, implementations, workflow reviews, and product usage observed across distributors, suppliers and manufacturers, rep agencies, retailers, and repair shops from 2024 through 2026. Specific Tromml field observations used in this paper include:

- Professional counter lines handling approximately 150 to 200 calls per day in observed distributor environments.
- Minecart deployments producing approximately three to five times more captured notes, with note length increasing roughly 5% to 20% depending on the deployment.
- A supplier trade-show engagement in which approximately 250 voice notes captured across a single show were structured and analyzed, surfacing an estimated \$9M in pipeline.
- Illustrative accounts, queues, routing examples and customer sentences composed from recurring aftermarket workflows. Account names are examples.
- Quotes not attributed to a named published source are drawn from Tromml field conversations and are de-identified.

These observations are directional. They should not be interpreted as controlled studies or industry-wide averages. Revenue and EBIT figures shown in this paper apply published third-party ranges to stated revenue and headcount assumptions; they are illustrative arithmetic, not Tromml projections or guarantees.

EXTERNAL SOURCES

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