THE DECISION SEQUENCE

MARKETING BUILT AROUND HOW PEOPLE DECIDE

Opportunity Discovery 01

Finding from the research spine and what they mean to client specific opportunities.

What We Do.

&

How We Do It.

J.R. WORDEN · thedecisionsequence.com

Opportunity Discovery

Determining Where the Firm Has a Credible Right to Matter

The distance between what a firm believes about itself and what it can prove.

CONTENTS

An attractive industry doesn't automatically produce an attractive opportunity for every firm inside it. A market can be expanding while a particular company stands still. It can be contracting nationally while demand concentrates in the exact geography and sectors a client serves. Both are often true at the same time, which is why an industry conclusion never substitutes for understanding the firm.

Process 00 established the industry without considering the client. Opportunity Discovery brings the client in and asks the harder question. Given what's objectively true about this market, where does this firm have a credible opportunity to matter?

Credible is doing important work in that sentence.

This isn't a brainstorming session built around what the firm would like to become. Examine its completed work, its capabilities, its clients, its approvals, its reputation, its relationships and the things it can't currently do. Then set that evidence against the market, against what the buyer has to resolve, and against the language competitors have already used up.

What comes out is a set of Strategic Truths, the governing findings every downstream decision has to account for. Brand and Positioning will turn them into language later. Process 01 is where they have to survive contact with the evidence first.

What the Ecosystem Rests On

Ask a firm what makes it different and you get a list. Ask what it can prove and the list gets shorter. Most firms have never been walked through that second conversation, and it is the one that decides what the marketing is allowed to say.

A Trust-Sequenced Engagement Ecosystem can only be built on three things at once. What the firm can demonstrate. What buyers need. What the market has is offering. Hope isn't one of them.

Opportunity Discovery finds that intersection. It narrows the industry intelligence from Process 00, adds the firm-specific facts Process 00 deliberately left out, and produces the Strategic Truths every later deliverable inherits.

The firms that struggle in this deliverable are usually the ones arriving with the most confidence about what they want to be true.

How the Work Gets Done

Placing the Firm Inside the Market

The Research Spine supplies the boundary, the structure, the economics, the buyers and the outlook. Opportunity Discovery uses that to diagnose one firm's market condition.

Look at where the firm operates, which sectors produce its revenue, how demand is moving around those sectors, and whether the real opportunity is local, regional, national or buried inside a specialty. The market the headlines describe and the market the firm can reach are rarely the same.

A large theoretical market can be completely inaccessible because the firm doesn't have the relationships, the capacity or the evidence to compete for it. Opportunity starts with the market the firm can credibly serve, not the largest number available.

What the Firm Can Prove

Firms arrive with a familiar collection of claims. They're experienced, responsive, collaborative, innovative and committed to their clients. Their competitors arrive with the same collection, often in the same order.

We've done it for firms...it took longer than it should have to notice they were doing nothing.

So look underneath for facts that can carry weight. Completed projects. Repeat engagements. Approvals and credentials. Documented outcomes. Unusual experience nobody else in the category has. Clients willing to say so on the record. A preferred self-description doesn't qualify.

The discipline: demonstrate, never assert. If a claim can't be tied to work the firm finished, a result it can document, an approval it earned or a client prepared to back it up, the claim doesn't enter the strategic foundation.

Run that test on your own three strongest claims. Beside each one, write the specific evidence a skeptical buyer could go and check. Completed work, a documented outcome, a client who would say it out loud. Claims with nothing beside them can't carry a position, however true they feel.

Understanding What the Buyer Has to Resolve

Then look at the people making and influencing the purchase. Demographics and job titles help, and they explain almost nothing about why a buyer advances, stalls or walks away from a firm that could clearly do the work.

What matters is what the buyer carries into the decision. The problem creating the urgency. The risk attached to choosing wrong. The people who have to support the recommendation internally. The conventions that make a decision feel defensible. The evidence required before commitment becomes acceptable at all.

Which is where Relevance, Credibility, Proof, Safety and Access stop being abstractions. A capability matters strategically when it answers something the buyer needs to understand, believe or defend to somebody else. Everything else is inventory.

One question, asked of your last five buyers, is worth more than most research: what nearly stopped you? The answer is rarely price and rarely capability. It is usually something nobody at the firm knew was in the room.

Mapping the Competitive and Referral Fields

Competitive analysis isn't comparing service lists and collecting screenshots. Examine how competitors describe themselves, which claims have converged into category language, and where the market has filled up with distinctions that no longer distinguish anyone.

White space has to sit where buyer relevance and client credibility overlap. A competitor may have left a position unclaimed because it's available. Or because nobody in the category can support it. Working out which is most of the job.

Also trace the referral ecosystem around the decision: the people who create access, transfer credibility, influence the selection, or quietly remove a firm from consideration before anyone knows it happened. In a lot of professional markets those relationships are the market structure.

Naming the Constraint

Every firm has a condition limiting what the opportunity can become. The brand may be new or underleveraged. The referral network may be genuinely valuable and completely informal. The principal may still be the source of credibility, the source of selling and the source of production all at once, which puts a ceiling on the firm that no amount of marketing gets through.

Name it plainly. Opportunities that ignores constraints are aspirations with a marketing budgets.

Most firms can identify their constraint in about ten seconds once somebody asks directly. What they can't do is raise it in a marketing meeting, because the constraint is frequently a person sitting in that meeting.

Distilling the Strategic Truths

Market condition, firm evidence, buyer psychology, competitive field, referral structure and operating constraint get distilled into a defined set of Strategic Truths. There's no target number. The test is whether a finding governs a decision that comes after it.

A Strategic Truth has to be grounded in evidence and consequential to the strategy. It should explain something the firm must protect, change, prove or account for. Remove one, and if the positioning, the audience priorities, the journey map and the engagement system all stay exactly where they were, it was never strategic.

Nobody puts a Strategic Truth on a website. They're the instructions the website copy has to obey.

Built to Be Corrected

This deliverable arrives as a working draft, because the client holds facts no outside research can reach. Corrections and disagreements sharpen the work. Missing evidence is information, and a client who pushes back on a finding is usually about to hand us a better one.

The draft separates verified evidence from conclusions that need client confirmation from questions still open. Approved corrections become part of the source of truth every later deliverable inherits. What a preference can't do is displace a finding because the preferred version reads better.

What Should Be Produced

A complete deliverable produces:

- A firm-specific market diagnosis grounded in the Research Spine
- An assessment of capabilities, evidence and operating realities
- An examination of buyer psychology and decision requirements
- Competitive language, positioning and referral analysis
- A plain statement of the firm's limiting constraint

- The governing Strategic Truths for the engagement
- Open questions and evidence requirements still to be resolved

This is the standard every idea gets judged against. Good marketing ideas that fail it are still failures.

Where AI Earns Its Place

AI examines much larger competitive fields, compare repeated language across dozens of firms, organize interviews and surface patterns that used to take weeks of manual review. It can’t decide that a claim is true because the client repeated it, or that a common phrase is worth anything strategically.

LLM commentary, client assertion and verified evidence are three different source types and have to be treated that way. AI finds the pattern. The Strategic Truths still need evidence and a judgment call.

What Process 01 Hands to Process 02

Brand and Positioning comes next. Process 01 establishes what’s true, where the opportunity sits and which constraint has to be respected. Process 02 turns those findings into the position, the language, the claims and the visual system the firm uses to say it consistently.

Which is the enjoyable part, and the part almost everyone wants to start with.