



The Portfolio Pipeline Marketing Blueprint

How Private Equity Firms Can Turn
Lean Marketing Teams Into Repeatable
Growth Engines



Private equity firms are under increasing pressure to create value faster, improve operational efficiency, and protect future revenue growth at the same time. In many portfolio companies, that pressure has changed the shape of the marketing function. Teams are smaller. Budgets are more tightly controlled. Expectations on CMOs and commercial leaders are higher.

This report examines the shift from company-level marketing activity to portfolio-level pipeline creation. It argues that pipeline can no longer be managed as an isolated execution issue inside each portfolio company. Instead, PE firms need a repeatable system for diagnosing marketing effectiveness, strengthening demand generation, and scaling proven growth behaviours across the portfolio.

The analysis is based on OrbitalX's work with PE-backed businesses, including the Cylindo case study: a first-time CMO operating without an internal marketing team, who partnered with OrbitalX to exceed H2 MQL targets and generate more than \$2.5M in marketing-led pipeline during a rebuild phase.

Paul Fifield, an Operating Advisor at Bessemer Venture Partners, investor, and founder with more than 25 years' experience building and scaling companies, reinforces this view, suggesting companies leverage specialist partners and AI-enabled workflows for faster growth instead of defaulting to permanent headcount.

“I’m all for using partners to scale really, really fast. It’s lower risk.”

Samiksha Gupta, an independent operating partner, emphasizes that growth systems only work when investors, management teams, and operators are aligned around the same outcome. In her words:

“Value creation only happens when all of these stakeholder groups are rolling in the same direction.”

THE PORTFOLIO PIPELINE PROBLEM

Why the old efficiency model is no longer enough

Private equity has always created value through a combination of operational efficiency, commercial discipline, leadership focus, and sharper financial management. In many cases, headcount reduction has been part of that playbook.

The problem is that pipeline does not respond to cost reduction in a linear way.

A leaner marketing function may improve short-term cost efficiency, but if the capability removed from the business is not replaced by a stronger system, the commercial consequences appear later.

What often happens after marketing capacity is reduced

- Campaigns slow down or become less consistent.
- Market presence weakens over time.
- Sales teams receive fewer warm opportunities.
- Brand storytelling becomes fragmented.
- Pipeline becomes more dependent on outbound, existing relationships, or legacy demand.
- The cost saving is visible immediately, while the pipeline risk appears months later.

This creates a new value creation problem for PE firms:

How do you preserve efficiency while maintaining the level of market activity required to support future revenue growth?

THE PORTFOLIO PIPELINE PROBLEM

The old trade-off is changing

AI, automation, and intelligent growth systems have changed the economics of marketing execution. Activities that once required large teams can now be accelerated through AI-enabled workflows, structured data, and managed execution.

However, technology alone is not enough. The firms that benefit most will be those that combine AI speed with human strategy, commercial judgment, and high-quality campaign execution.

Paul Fifield makes the same point from an operating perspective. His advice to founders and growth-stage CEOs is not simply to hire more people when a gap appears, but to challenge whether the work can be done differently.

“ Every company really should think super carefully before they hire anyone right now and really test yourself and say, can this be done in a different way with all of the technologies that we have available right now?

For PE-backed companies, this is the central resource question. The issue is not whether marketing headcount should be reduced or expanded. The issue is whether the company has found the lowest-risk, highest-leverage way to maintain market momentum.

The practical shift

BEFORE Reduce marketing headcount and accept pipeline risk.

NOW Reduce inefficiency while replacing lost capability with a growth system.

BEFORE Treat each portfolio company as a separate marketing challenge.

NOW Build repeatable growth infrastructure across the portfolio.

BEFORE Measure marketing activity in isolation.

NOW Connect marketing to revenue.

BEFORE Customer marketing is an afterthought due to resource gaps.

NOW Customer marketing receives the required focus to protect and fix GRR and NRR.

THE PORTFOLIO PIPELINE PROBLEM

Why this matters for value creation

The more useful question is not whether a company has reduced marketing cost. It is whether the company has replaced the lost capability with a better operating model.

If a portfolio company removes marketing resource without introducing a stronger system, pipeline risk increases. If it replaces manual execution with a structured growth engine, leaner teams can continue to create meaningful market activity.

This is where partner-led execution becomes strategically important. Fifield's view is that specialist partners allow companies to move quickly without taking on the same hiring risk. In marketing, that matters because the function often requires a mix of data, positioning, content, campaign execution, sales enablement, and reporting.

A lean team may not need to own every one of those capabilities internally from day one. But it does need reliable access to them. That is the difference between cutting cost and redesigning the operating model.

This changes the role of marketing in the value creation plan. It is no longer just a function to be assessed company by company. It becomes a system that can be measured across the portfolio:

- Which companies are active in market
- Which stories are creating attention
- Which teams are under-supported
- Where pipeline is being created most efficiently
- Which growth behaviours can be repeated elsewhere

The implication is clear: pipeline should not be viewed only as a portfolio company issue. It should be managed as a portfolio-level value creation lever.

WHY PIPELINE UNDERPERFORMANCE GETS MISDIAGNOSED

Why execution is often the symptom, not the cause

When pipeline performance weakens, the immediate explanation is usually tactical.

AI is not being used well enough.

A campaign did not perform.

A team is not moving quickly enough.

Sales needs more leads.

Marketing needs to produce more content.

These issues may be real, but they are rarely the root cause.

In many PE-backed companies, the underlying problem is structural. The marketing function lacks the system required to consistently identify the right audience, build a differentiated story, activate campaigns, and connect activity to commercial outcomes.

What the symptoms look like



The ICP exists, but is not operational

Many companies have an ideal customer profile written down, but it is not consistently reflected in campaign targeting, account selection, database quality, or sales follow-up.

The result is wasted activity: campaigns reach too broad an audience, and sales teams spend time on accounts that are unlikely to convert.

Doug Regner, an operating partner at Unusual Ventures (a seed-stage venture firm focused on data infrastructure, SaaS, and fintech), makes this point sharply in the context of early-stage go-to-market. He argues that companies often try to sell too broadly before they have earned the right to scale. The stronger move is to focus tightly enough to create repeatability, proof, and referenceable customers.

“ It’s really important to be as narrow as you possibly can.



Campaigns happen in bursts

Activity often spikes around launches, events, reports, or quarterly pushes, then drops back down. This makes demand generation episodic rather than systematic.

A portfolio company may look active for short periods, but lack the consistent market presence needed to build trust over time.



Sales and marketing define quality differently

Marketing may report MQLs, content downloads, or engagement. Sales may judge quality based on meetings, urgency, fit, or opportunity creation.

When those definitions are not aligned, both teams can be looking at the same funnel and drawing different conclusions.



The story is not distinctive enough

In crowded categories, buyers need a clear reason to care. If the company's message sounds like every other competitor, campaign execution becomes much harder.

The issue is not only whether the company is visible. It is whether the market understands why the company matters now.



Reporting hides the commercial picture

A team may show strong activity through impressions, clicks, MQLs, or form fills, but still struggle to prove how that activity is contributing to meetings, opportunities, or revenue.

This is particularly risky in PE-backed environments, where leadership teams need a clear view of what is creating commercial movement.



The team is under-supported

Many lean marketing teams are being asked to deliver enterprise-level output without the people, systems, or external support required to do it consistently.

AI can help, but only if it is used within a clear strategic and operational framework. Used in isolation, it may increase output without improving quality.

WHY PIPELINE UNDERPERFORMANCE GETS MISDIAGNOSED

The attribution gap

One of the clearest signs of a system problem is a disconnect between marketing attribution and sales performance.

Marketing may report campaign activity. Sales may report meetings and opportunities. Finance may see only the final commercial outcome.

When these views are not connected, PE firms are left without a reliable understanding of how marketing activity is influencing pipeline.

Why this matters

- The effect of cutting marketing capability is often delayed.
- The immediate cost saving is visible.
- The lost pipeline may not become clear until months later.
- By the time the issue appears in revenue forecasts, the business may already have lost market momentum.

A better diagnostic question

Instead of asking whether a portfolio company is “doing enough marketing”, PE firms should ask:

What system exists to create qualified pipeline repeatedly, and can that system be measured and scaled?

That question moves the discussion away from isolated execution and toward repeatable value creation.

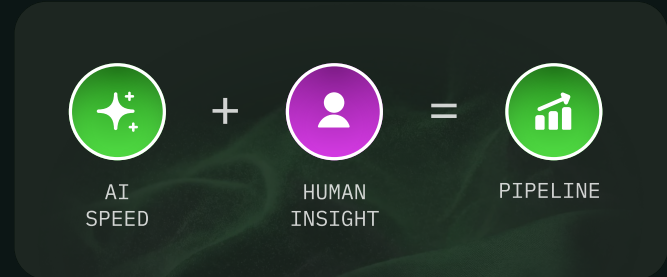


THE NEW GROWTH MODEL FOR LEANER MARKETING TEAMS

How lean teams can create more leverage

The new model is not based on replacing marketing teams with AI. It is based on using AI, data, and managed execution to give lean teams more commercial leverage.

AI can accelerate research, content production, campaign development, reporting, and analysis. But speed alone does not create trust or market authority. As AI makes generic content easier to produce, original human insight becomes more important.



Buyers do not need more undifferentiated content. They need relevant expertise, strong points of view, clear proof, and a reason to believe that a company understands their specific market context.

What changes in the operating model

The operating model shifts in five important ways.

First, content is no longer limited by the pace of manual production. AI can accelerate research, drafting, editing, repurposing, and analysis. However, the strongest content still needs human perspective to make it credible and specific.

Second, campaigns move from isolated moments to connected systems. A report, webinar, email sequence, LinkedIn campaign, sales asset, and outbound message should not operate separately. They should reinforce the same commercial story across multiple touchpoints.

Third, team capacity expands beyond internal headcount. A lean CMO or small marketing function can access strategic and executional support without rebuilding a full department immediately.

Fourth, measurement becomes more commercially focused. The question is not simply whether activity happened, but whether it created the right engagement, meetings, pipeline, and sales movement.

Finally, learning becomes portfolio-wide. When one company discovers a message, segment, channel, or campaign structure that works, that learning can be captured and adapted elsewhere rather than remaining isolated inside one business.

THE NEW GROWTH MODEL FOR LEANER MARKETING TEAMS

Why human insight becomes more valuable

The more content AI can generate, the more important it becomes to know what is actually worth saying.

Tijs van Santen, a go-to-market operator and former operating partner at Marlin Equity Partners, argues that modern GTM teams need deeper context than before. It is no longer enough to understand a persona at a surface level. Teams need to understand the buyer's business context, product knowledge, industry pressures, and the decision process already happening before a rep is involved.

“ It's not just a persona, but it's also the context of the industry that this company is working in.

The strongest campaigns are built from insight that competitors cannot easily copy: customer conversations, market experience, original data, category expertise, and clear commercial understanding.

For PE-backed companies, this is especially important. Buyers are researching more independently, comparing vendors earlier, and often speaking to sales much later in the buying process. Companies need to be visible and credible before the sales conversation begins.

A modern portfolio pipeline system therefore, needs both speed and substance:

- ✓ AI to accelerate production and analysis
- ✓ Human expertise to define the point of view
- ✓ Data to identify where attention should be focused
- ✓ Executional capacity to get campaigns live consistently
- ✓ Reporting to show what is creating commercial movement

THE PORTFOLIO PIPELINE MARKETING BLUEPRINT

Audience, story, campaigns, execution

A repeatable pipeline system starts before channel selection. It does not begin with an email sequence, a LinkedIn campaign, a webinar, or a report. It begins with a structured view of the market and a clear understanding of what the company needs to be known for.

OrbitalX uses a four-part framework to build this system.



Audience

The first requirement is clarity on the accounts and people the company needs to reach.

This includes:

- Priority account segments
- Buying committees and personas
- Existing customer and competitor exclusions
- Underpenetrated market segments
- Contact coverage and data quality
- Signals of market interest or intent

Clear audience definition prevents wasted activity. It ensures that every campaign is designed around the accounts most likely to create commercial value.



Story

The second requirement is a clear market narrative.

This is not simply messaging. It is the answer to a more strategic question: what should the company be known for?

A strong story should make it easier for buyers to understand:

- The problem being solved
- Why the problem matters now
- What has changed in the market
- Why the company has a credible point of view
- What proof supports the claim

In markets where AI has made content production easier, differentiated storytelling is one of the clearest ways to build trust.



Campaigns

Campaigns translate audience and story into market-facing assets and touchpoints.

These may include:

- Thought leadership reports
- Sales enablement assets
- Executive content
- Case studies
- Email campaigns
- LinkedIn campaigns
- Webinars and live events
- Video content
- One-pagers
- Outbound messaging

The strongest campaigns do not operate as isolated assets. They work as connected systems that create multiple opportunities for the right accounts to engage.



Execution

Execution is where many lean teams struggle. They may have the strategy, but not the capacity to build, launch, manage, and optimise campaigns at the required pace.

A portfolio pipeline system solves this by turning strategy into repeatable multi-channel execution.

Blueprint stage	Core question	Output
Audience	Who exactly needs to be reached?	ICP, account lists, personas, contact strategy
Story	What should the company be known for?	Market narrative, campaign themes, content pillars
Campaigns	How should the story be packaged?	Assets, offers, content, sales enablement
Execution	How will activity reach the market consistently?	Multi-channel campaigns, reporting, optimisation
Pipeline	What commercial movement is being created?	Engagement, meetings, qualified opportunities, revenue impact

The objective is not to create more marketing activity. It is to create a system that turns market focus into measurable pipeline generation.

FROM COMPANY-LEVEL FIXES TO PORTFOLIO-LEVEL SCALE

The value of repeatability

Every PE portfolio has companies that are performing better than others. In some cases, those companies have sharper positioning. In others, they have stronger sales and marketing alignment, better data, stronger content, or more consistent campaign execution.

The opportunity is to identify what is working and make it repeatable.

Historically, this has been difficult. Each company has its own team structure, tooling, category dynamics, maturity level, and commercial priorities. As a result, marketing performance is often assessed in isolation.

A portfolio-level growth system changes that.

Samiksha Gupta's view adds useful nuance here: portfolio-level repeatability should not become one-size-fits-all execution.

“ At some point, context and judgement becomes more important.

The best PE firms will not simply lift a campaign from one company and drop it into another. They will understand which parts of the system are transferable: the diagnostic method, the audience logic, the campaign structure, the reporting model, and the operating cadence. Then they will adapt the story, offer, and channel mix to fit the company's context.

The portfolio replication challenge

The challenge is not usually a lack of ambition. Most PE firms want to compare marketing effectiveness across companies, replicate high-performing behaviours, support lean teams, move quickly after acquisition, and protect pipeline after cost reduction.

The difficulty is that marketing systems are often inconsistent from one portfolio company to another. Reporting structures differ. Tooling differs. Team capability differs. Some companies have mature data and sales alignment, while others are still working from fragmented lists, unclear ICP definitions, or outdated messaging.

Even when one portfolio company is performing well, the reasons for that performance may not be documented in a way that can be transferred. A successful campaign may depend on a specific leader, a strong agency relationship, or a set of informal practices that are hard to scale.

A portfolio pipeline system is designed to make those patterns visible. It allows PE firms to understand not only which companies are performing, but why they are performing and whether those behaviours can be applied elsewhere.

FROM COMPANY-LEVEL FIXES TO PORTFOLIO-LEVEL SCALE

Marketing Per Marketer / MPM

To manage pipeline at portfolio-level, PE firms need a practical way to understand marketing effectiveness relative to team size and market output.

Marketing Per Marketer, or MPM, provides a lens for comparing how much commercial movement a marketing function is creating based on the resources available to it.

It can help identify:

- Which portfolio companies are overperforming with lean teams
- Which teams are under-supported
- Where marketing output is not translating into pipeline
- How competitors are gaining or losing visibility
- Which stories and campaigns are creating engagement
- Where a growth engine should be deployed first

What a portfolio view should measure

Metric area	What it indicates
Marketing output	Whether the company is active enough in market
Engagement	Whether the target audience is responding
Web traffic	Whether awareness and interest are increasing
Social sharing	Whether the story is travelling
Share of voice	Whether market presence is improving
Campaign performance	Which messages, assets, and channels are working
Meetings booked	Whether activity is creating sales conversations
Qualified pipeline	Whether marketing is influencing commercial outcomes

The goal is not another dashboard but a clearer operating view of portfolio pipeline creation.

Once PE firms can see what is working, they can scale it.

CASE STUDY: HOW CYLINDO BUILT PIPELINE WITHOUT A MARKETING TEAM

How a first-time CMO grew pipeline without an internal marketing team

Jennifer Rasmussen joined Cylindo as Chief Marketing Officer in July 2025. The company, now part of Chaos, had strong 3D visualisation technology and clear market potential, but needed a sharper commercial story, fresh demand generation, and stronger sales enablement.

The challenge was significant: Jennifer had no broader internal marketing team and no additional headcount budget for 2025. She was expected to rebuild marketing momentum, support sales, and contribute to ambitious H2 pipeline targets without the resources normally required to do so.

The challenge

Cylindo needed to create demand in a complex category where buyers require education, reassurance, and proof before they are ready to engage. The product was strong, but the marketing engine needed to be rebuilt around clearer positioning, better account focus, and more consistent campaign execution.

The business needed more than content production. It needed a practical growth system that could move quickly, improve market visibility, and support pipeline creation without adding operational complexity for a one-person marketing function.



CASE STUDY: HOW CYLINDO BUILT PIPELINE WITHOUT A MARKETING TEAM

The OrbitalX role

Jennifer partnered with OrbitalX as an embedded B2B marketing partner. The team acted as both strategic counsel and executional firepower, helping Cylindo move quickly without requiring Jennifer to build and manage a full internal department.

OrbitalX supported across four priority areas:

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Audience and data
Development of ideal customer profiles and a stronger database. |  Sales enablement
Rewritten sales decks, one-pagers, and case studies grounded in customer proof. |
|  Thought leadership
Assets tied to real buyer problems, including return rates and modular product complexity. |  Performance content
A campaign engine that balanced speed, craft, and quality. |

The results

Despite the absence of a broader internal marketing team, Cylindo delivered a strong H2 performance.

RESULT	107%	\$2.5M+	245%	10/10 NPS
OUTCOME	of H2 MQL target achieved with a lean marketing function	in pipeline generated by marketing alone during a rebuild phase	of September MQL goal delivered	Jennifer's likelihood to recommend OrbitalX

Jennifer's feedback captured why the model worked:

"They're not just executors. They're partners."

"They helped me move at speed, without sacrificing quality."

"I don't have to brief five people numerous times. I have one conversation and things get done. Fast."

The significance of the Cylindo case study is not only that performance improved. It is that performance improved without rebuilding a traditional marketing team.

For PE-backed companies, the lesson is clear: lean marketing leaders do not always need more headcount first. They need leverage, structure, and executional capacity around them.

THE 30/60/90-DAY PORTFOLIO PIPELINE PLAN

From diagnosis to repeatable growth

A portfolio pipeline system does not need to take a year to begin producing insight and momentum. The first 90 days should establish the operating view, activate the first campaigns, and identify which plays can be scaled.

TIMEFRAME	DAYS 1–30	DAYS 31–60	DAYS 61–90
PRIMARY FOCUS	Diagnose and activate	Optimise and expand	Scale and systemise
CORE ACTIONS	Analyse marketing effectiveness across selected portfolio companies. Identify priority ICPs, accounts, personas, and pipeline gaps. Review existing campaigns, content, attribution, and sales handoff. Assess database quality and account coverage. Define the core market narrative. Prioritise campaign themes. Launch initial AI-enabled, human-led campaigns.	Identify which messages, channels, and audiences are gaining traction. Expand campaigns across additional formats and touchpoints. Refine targeting based on engagement and intent signals. Strengthen sales and marketing alignment around qualified pipeline. Improve landing pages, sales assets, and follow-up sequences.	Compare performance across selected portfolio companies. Identify high-performing behaviours and campaign plays. Roll successful plays into additional companies where relevant. Benchmark companies against competitors. Build an ongoing portfolio pipeline view. Document repeatable playbooks by audience, story, channel, and offer.
WHAT TO MONITOR	ICP engagement, web visits from target accounts, content interaction, email and social response, meetings booked, and qualitative sales feedback.	Segment-level engagement, channel performance, sales acceptance, conversion from engagement to meetings, asset usage, and drop-off points.	Portfolio-level performance patterns, repeatable campaign structures, competitor visibility, qualified pipeline movement, and team capacity gaps.
EXPECTED OUTPUT	Clearer ICP focus, narrative direction, first campaigns live, and early evidence of whether the right audience is responding.	Improved messaging, stronger targeting, better sales alignment, and a clearer view of which campaign plays deserve more investment.	Repeatable plays, portfolio benchmarking, documented learnings, and a growth system ready to be expanded across the portfolio.

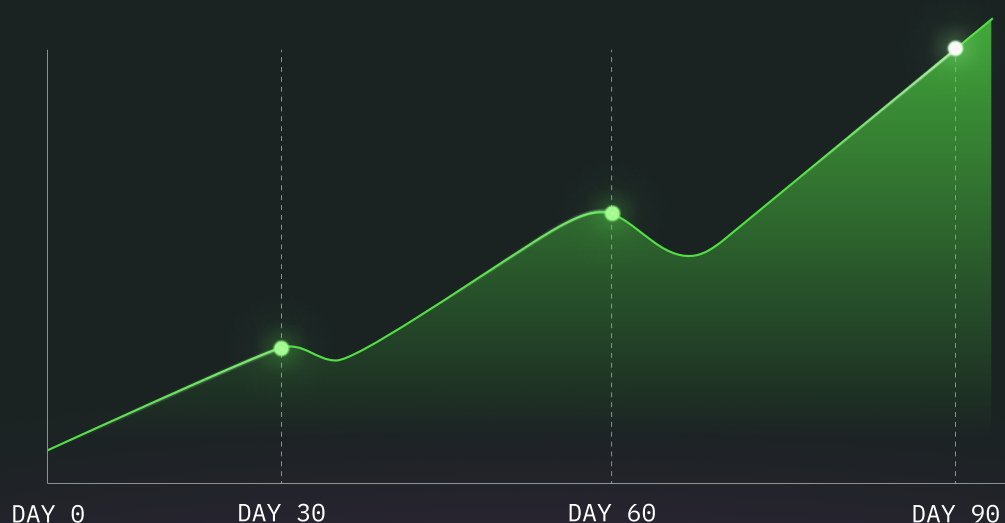
THE 30/60/90-DAY PORTFOLIO PIPELINE PLAN

How to use the roadmap

The purpose of the roadmap is not to create a rigid transformation programme. It is to create a practical operating sequence: diagnose, activate, learn, and scale.

By the end of the first 30 days, PE firms should have a clearer view of where pipeline is under-supported and which campaigns can create immediate movement. By day 60, the focus should shift toward improving what is working and removing what is not. By day 90, the strongest plays should be documented, benchmarked, and prepared for wider portfolio application.

This approach allows PE firms to move quickly without treating every portfolio company as a blank-page marketing challenge.



CONCLUSION: TURNING PIPELINE INTO A REPEATABLE VALUE CREATION LEVER

The next value creation lever is repeatable pipeline

The market has changed. Buyers are harder to reach, more informed before speaking to sales, and increasingly influenced by the content, proof, and expertise they encounter before entering a formal buying process.

At the same time, many PE-backed companies are operating with leaner marketing teams and higher growth expectations. This creates a gap between what the business needs from marketing and what the internal team can realistically deliver alone.

That gap cannot be solved by activity alone. It requires a better system.

A portfolio pipeline system gives PE firms a way to:

- ☒ Identify where marketing performance is under-supported
- ☒ Understand which companies are creating commercial movement
- ☒ Strengthen audience targeting and market storytelling
- ☒ Surround lean teams with executional capacity
- ☒ Connect marketing activity to pipeline outcomes
- ☒ Scale proven behaviours across the portfolio

The Cylindo case study illustrates what this can look like in practice. A first-time CMO, operating without a broader internal marketing team, was able to exceed H2 MQL targets and generate more than \$2.5M in marketing-led pipeline by partnering with OrbitalX as an embedded growth engine.

Looking ahead, PE firms that treat pipeline as a portfolio-level system will be better positioned to protect future revenue growth while maintaining operational discipline.

The firms that win will not simply cut faster.

They will learn faster, execute faster, and scale what works.

Build your portfolio pipeline engine

OrbitalX helps PE firms and portfolio companies identify where pipeline is under-supported, strengthen the growth system around lean teams, and turn market insight into measurable commercial movement.

[Request a Portfolio Pipeline Diagnostic](#) →

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