Same demo, different room.

Case study · 21 September 2026 · NAMES REMOVED · A factory software company selling into France

Software for running a factory day to day. Around thirty people, based in North America, selling into France against a French competitor with more money and more feet on the ground. Buyer: the Director of Marketing. GTM Sprint, October 2025 to June 2026. **A questionnaire, four staff calls and two working sessions, spread across five months.**

> **The problem.** The only person selling into France had broken lead records on the phone. The calls went well. Prospects agreed there was a problem, agreed the software solved it, then put it in the “nice to have” pile and went quiet. Almost all of their marketing spoke to continuous improvement managers, who love the product and can’t sign for it, while the budget holders sat two to four rungs up and never heard from anyone.

THE WORRY THIS ANSWERS

“Positioning won’t fix a sales problem.”

The marketing director half believed it himself. He’d already grown qualified leads by working the funnel harder, and suspected the ceiling was somewhere else.

What they did next. In September 2026 they signed a second, wider sprint. They did that holding every uncertainty still open in this piece.

What went in

Volume of input varies by client. The output does not: one page, twelve decisions.



~820 pages of material

About the length of Moby-Dick. Read, listened to, carded, turned into one page.

Not included: 74 competitor and site screenshots, 17 brand and logo files. Images have no honest word count.

~44 ALREADY IN THEIR FILES

11 GATHERED DURING THE SPRINT

1 positioning canvas
12 decisions, one at a time

+ judgement throughout

ALREADY IN THEIR FILES

about 20 recorded French sales calls, mapped one by one

1 positioning manifesto they had written themselves

3 supporting documents: factor tree, lead qualification, sales deck

2 customer record systems opened up (thin on why anyone bought)

17 brand and logo files

1 lead scraping tool, access granted

GATHERED DURING THE SPRINT

1 questionnaire, 3 questions and 3,962 words of answers

4 staff interviews, all recorded

2 working sessions, up to 4 of their people in the room

3 competitors pulled apart: sites, LinkedIn, ad libraries, 58 screenshots

1 their own site and ads captured, 16 screenshots

About 80 percent of it was already sitting in the company's own files. The 2 dashed squares are the weak ones: thin on why anyone bought. The 20 recorded French sales calls are counted off the insight board, so that number is approximate. These were sales and discovery calls their account executive had recorded, not interviews with won customers about why they bought. That is still the gap.

Nobody ran new research. The richest material was already sitting in a sales rep's SharePoint. Every claim in it was pulled onto its own card and filed under one of the twelve canvas rows, so the rows carrying real weight separated from the rows running on assumption.

One decision, start to finish

Volume is easy to claim and hard to believe, so here is a single decision with the working shown. It is the one the whole sprint turns on.

Their own intake form, filled in before I was hired, already said it: they were good at reaching the frontline teams who use the tool daily and they struggled to reach the people who sign. That is the observation. It is not yet a decision, and it sat in their form doing nothing.

Four things in the pile said the same thing from different directions. Their account executive, describing what happens when he calls the top of the plant: "So I think, I'll call the site director directly. When I call him he tells me, yes, I have someone who handles that. So see it with him. So when I talk to him, he says, you have to see it with my director." The buck goes both ways and stops nowhere. A card written on the foraging board during the call mapping, flagged with a starburst: "Pas priorité numéro un. Pourquoi???????" Not priority number one. Why. Their sales deck, carrying eleven personas at once with no hierarchy, from site director down to workshop supervisor. And the four struggles their brief had ignored, recruitment, blindness across sites, margins, invisible losses, every one of them a leadership problem and none of them a continuous improvement manager's problem.

Then the fork, and it is a real one. Written into the segment file as an open question before it was answered: do we speak to who we sell to, the continuous improvement manager, or to who suffers most, the site or group director?

The case for the improvement manager is strong. He is the one who uses the tool every day, carries the project internally, and takes the demo. Aiming a brand at anyone else means aiming past the person who actually wants it.

It lost on the struggles. The pains with real money attached sit above him, and he has neither the budget nor the view across sites to act on them. So the improvement manager kept his role and lost the positioning: internal champion,

not the target. Rejected in the same file, in writing, along with two other candidates.

That is what the twelve rows are for. Four sources, none of them decisive alone, pointing at one row until the row could be decided rather than guessed.

WHAT IT ASKED OF THEM

The questionnaire, four staff calls and two working sessions

Spread across five months. Nobody was asked to run new research.

GAP CALL TO DELIVERABLES IN HAND

12 days

Gap analysis 12 Feb 2026. Messaging map and justifications 24 Feb.

Before, after, later

	BEFORE · OCT 2025	AFTER · APR 2026	LATER
Who it's for	Eleven job titles in the deck. "Almost all our marketing is made for continuous improvement directors."	One buyer: the industrial director of a French multi-site manufacturer. The continuous improvement manager becomes the champion.	JUN 2026 Client using the new definition unprompted. DEC 2026 Is outreach aimed at them?

	BEFORE · OCT 2025	AFTER · APR 2026	LATER
What sales says on a call	The full-product demo. “Our demo is a show-off.”	Two low-risk first offers instead: two days on one factory floor, or a five-week pilot on one site.	
How they find customers	One salesperson, a phone and a CRM, calling from the wrong time zone.	Four moments that make a factory buy, checked twice a week, acted on within 48 hours.	JUN 2026 Campaign built, list cut 58 to 15.
How it looks	Blue, like every competitor in the category.	A visual world they can own, and a physical object that lands on a desk.	JUN 2026 Adopted for direct mail, shelved for trade shows on cost.

Four rows. Each one below, with the thing itself.

01 Who it’s for

BEFORE

Directrice de site · Directeur des opérations · Resp. Excellence opérationnelle · Resp. Maintenance · Resp. Amélioration continue · Resp. SSE · Chef d’équipe Qualité · Ingénieur Méthode · Chef d’équipe · Resp. de production · Superviseur d’atelier

Eleven job titles in the sales deck. They had written the problem into the intake questionnaire themselves: “very effective at speaking to frontline teams” but “struggle to reach decision-makers who approve and sign off.”

AFTER

The industrial director of a French manufacturing group with several sites.

250 to 2,000 staff, reporting to the chief executive, holding a budget. The hard filter is the number of sites rather than headcount, because the pain only bites when you're running plants you can't personally walk.

> **"Almost all our marketing is made for continuous improvement directors."**
>
> Louis, on the diagnostic call. Nobody argued.

Those directors like the product. Then comes the line: I'm not the one who decides, I have to take this upstairs. The continuous improvement manager got reclassified, not dropped: the internal champion who uses the software daily, rather than the person the marketing talks to.

The note. The French calls were with prospects, not with customers who had already bought. Nobody asked a won deal why they chose them, and the CRM held little on that either. So this buyer is well argued and still untested against how customers actually talk. The company also had a separate positioning project running for the American market at the same time.

02 What sales says on a call

> **"Our demo is a show-off. It's wow. You take them for a Ferrari ride at 300 km/h and the guy just wants to go get his baguette while respecting the speed limit."**
>
> The salesperson, the only salesperson covering France, 16 December 2025

Here's what prospects said back, stacked the way Louis read them out on the call: it's very dense. We want something less complex. I struggle to see how to start. When I see a system like that I think, in five years maybe. There were a lot of boxes to fill in.

> **"It breaks your heart almost every time. They say it'd be nice, but it's not super urgent."**

The salesperson, on asking about urgency

BEFORE · THE ASK

“Book a demo.”

The full product, all of it, to someone who cannot sign.

AFTER · TWO OFFERS

A field diagnostic

Two days. One of their project managers stands on one factory floor, watches, and hands back what the director can’t see from the office plus what it’s costing.

A sandbox pilot

Five weeks, one site. Real rituals, measured results, roll out if it works.

Both do the same job. They shrink what a director has to say yes to down to something they can approve alone.

The note. The growth lead changed position live on the diagnostic call, which is rarer than it sounds:

> **“It’s true we have this educational tendency through our blog articles and maybe even through our demos, when that’s not really a moment for educating. It’s more a moment for answering.”**
>
> The growth lead, 12 February 2026

The salesperson pushed back twice, and he had a case. Showing less of the product was the opposite of what the chief executive had asked for, and he’d watched simplified entry points turn into months of security review for very little money. The marketing director separately questioned how far the recruitment angle could carry. Neither argument was settled in the sprint.

03 How they find customers

> **“I was a BDR. A phone, a CRM, and I was in charge of finding relevant contacts to call. So it’s call call.”**
>
> The salesperson, describing the entire French demand engine

He was good at it. He also worked 1pm to 9pm French time from North America while the French competitor answered at 8am from Paris, and he’d lost accounts to exactly that. Two reps at home are worth roughly one in France. With no signal to work from, he once cold-called a plant that was closing.

AFTER · FOUR TRIGGERS

Four moments that make a factory actually buy rather than agree politely.

- Takeover, merger, new plant, reorganisation
- A key manager leaving with the process knowledge
- Heavy turnover
- A newly appointed director

The logic sits on the canvas in one line: you don’t convince the 95 percent, you find the 5 percent where the urgency just got created. Signals checked twice a week, acted on within 48 hours.

The first campaign built on it was a dictaphone. A real one, in a box, posted to a named director, with a postcard carrying a line from the narrative, and a card pointing to a short video from the salesperson about the three situations that matter most.

The note. The France-specific detail is worth stealing. Louis argued the call to action should be “email me or call me” rather than “book a meeting”, because the recipients are French vice presidents aged fifty plus and a QR code to a phone video is the wrong object for them. They changed it on the call:

> **“We know the French like talking on the phone.”**

The list is the honest bit. Louis’s target list started at 58 contacts and the client cut it to 15 genuinely contactable ones, because some of what the tooling surfaced was wrong for the profile. They were gracious about it. Still a miss on a deliverable.

Why “positioning won’t fix a sales problem” didn’t hold

The marketing director had already worked the sales problem as a sales problem, and it had worked up to a point:

- **Working the funnel harder.** More qualified leads, acquisition cost going down. His own verdict, in the first email he sent Louis: “I know that the way we communicate is seriously holding us back.”
- **Cost-of-inaction content.** Articles putting a number on what the chaos costs, written to create urgency. The salesperson had already tested the theory in the field: it opens their eyes, and opening someone’s eyes doesn’t make them act.
- **Their own positioning document.** Two of them had already drafted a manifesto with a category, an emotional promise and a tagline in it. It was never adopted. Writing the words down is the easy half; deciding who to aim them at, and being able to defend that in a room, is the half that stalls.

The company was also rebuilding its discovery process, and the salesperson was already working the new-appointment trigger by hand off Sales Navigator six weeks before anyone said the word “trigger” on a call. None of it was wrong. It was aimed at the wrong ladder.

The sprint didn’t make the sales team better at selling. It changed who they call, when they call, and what they ask that person to say yes to first. The product never changed.

> **“You put words on feelings I had and that I maybe couldn’t express, or even identify at all.”**
>
> The marketing director, on the diagnostic call

Later

The sprint produced no measurable results inside its own window. A month after signing, the company’s budget and priorities were reset company-wide

and marketing was pointed at whatever could show a number by August. the growth lead, on the last call:

> **“There was a slowdown, not because of Stand The F*ck Out’s work, not at all.”**

> **“I can understand it was frustrating on your side, because there were no clear outcomes. But on our side, nothing at all is lost.”**

Nothing here is claimed as a result. Positioning takes twelve to eighteen months to show up in pipeline and depends on what the client does next. The sprint gave them a decided buyer, four triggers, two offers and a campaign. The check-ins are for what happens with it.

- **June 2026:** the brand work was adopted for direct mail into Europe and shelved for trade shows. Their reasons, not mine: too many physical pieces to ship across an ocean, stands that may not permit it, and internal resistance to how far it went. Adopted in principle, paused in practice.
- **June 2026:** dictaphone campaign built, about to post to 15 vetted accounts. Website menu change agreed off the segment work. A full day of the July offsite booked to roll the deliverables out to the marketing team. Nothing shipped yet.
- **September 2026:** the French homepage still runs the old headline (checked 21 Sep). They signed a second, wider sprint.
- **December 2026:** numbers check-in.

In their words

> **“I had never even thought to look for and identify the event that makes them come to us at that moment.”**
>
> The marketing director, on what the diagnostic did

> **“I get the impression you’re walking on eggshells. Don’t. We have no problem with you telling us the truth, we’re**

> **fine hearing the truth.”**
>
> The growth lead, on how to work with an outsider

FOR YOU IF

Your sales team is good and your product is good. Prospects agree with everything on the call and then go quiet. And the people who could actually sign have never heard of you.