SaaS Is Coming For Your Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner.

Here's what you must do in the next 24 months to stop it.

SIMON PENSON · SCALED.CO.UK · AGENCY HACKERS IBIZA 2026

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A problem without a solution is just a problem.

Jerry Maguire

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WHO

I live in both worlds.

SaaS investor. Agency operator. NED on both sides of the table. **I know which side wins** - because I'm helping build it.

01 Built & sold a 350-person agency to IPG.

02 Co-founder, Haatch - 180+ B2B SaaS investments.

03 NED across SaaS and agency; works with PE on acquisitions.

GET IN TOUCH

Simon Penson

simon@scaled.co.uk

— THE CONFESSION

I've been on the inside of exits a dozen times.

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— THE RULE

90% of every species that ever lived is gone.

→ They didn't get worse. The environment changed faster than they could.

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This is not a talk about a threat that's coming.

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The asteroid already hit.

→ And it's wearing a Claude logo!

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WHAT HIT

Three things changed at once.

01

Software cost

The cost of building it collapsed to near zero.

02

Humans v AI

We now have the ability to choose who does the work.

03

The question

Clients started asking: why am I paying you for that?

IT'S ALREADY VISIBLE

SaaS wants to eat your lunch - and they have four options.

They partner with you → They buy you → You buy them → They build it themselves

Three of the four keep you in the game. The fourth is why the clock is 24 months.

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— THE DENIAL WINDOW

You can't smell the fire yet.

→ There is always a gap between impact and collapse. Revenue still comes in. Clients still call. That's not safety - that's the gap. And you're living in it right now.

SaaS is already on it. And here's why.

→ The threat isn't theoretical — it's shipping every quarter. Here's what SaaS has already worked out, and what it means for you.

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THE PRIZE

For every £1 spent on software, £6 is spent on services.

£1

SOFTWARE

£6

SERVICES - YOU

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— THE WRONG STORY

Everyone says AI lets software capture all £7.

→ Nobody talks about how. And they're wrong about who.

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THE EVIDENCE

51%

of SaaS licences sit unused.

THE SEATS ARE ALREADY EMPTY. THE LOCK-IN IS ALREADY GONE. SOURCE: ZYLO 2026 SAAS MANAGEMENT INDEX.

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THE EVIDENCE

~£0

The cost of building production software.

WHAT TOOK A TEAM AND A YEAR NOW TAKES A PROMPT AND AN AFTERNOON.

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— AND FOR AGENCIES…

Closing business just got harder - and it isn't your pitch.

→ In-house teams and procurement are working out - in real time - what they actually need from a partner. The brief is being rewritten while you're mid-proposal.

Your proposition has a shelf life. It just got shorter.

→ Go-to-market and positioning used to hold for three years. Now it's three quarters. The offer you sold last year is being benchmarked against capabilities that didn't exist when you wrote it.

The new economics.

→ This is a zero sum game. The old model is dying - here's the economics of the one replacing it.

THE BOUNDARY

One thin line. Two different worlds.

↑ ABOVE THE LINE

The new world.

Outcome or token priced. System compounds. Small teams. Sharp, fast-evolving GTM and propositions. Software-like multiples.

THE BOUNDARY · YOU ARE HERE

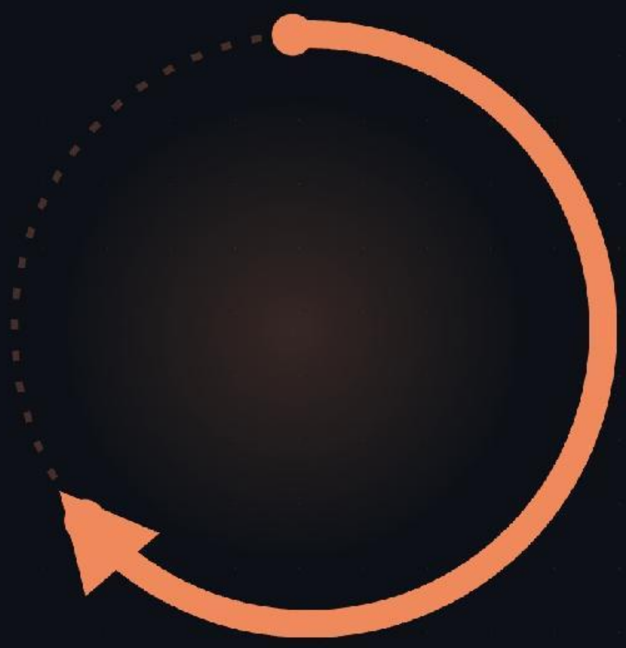
↓ BELOW THE LINE

The world that's ending.

Time billed. Utilisation. Headcount. Day rates. Economics that no longer earn a multiple.

THE MISSING PIECE

Measuring the outcome is not enough.



THE OPEN LOOP

MEASURES · NEVER MOVES

VS

THE CLOSED LOOP

MEASURES · MOVES · COMPOUNDS

YOU ALREADY KNOW THIS COMPANY

SEMrush can tell you your rankings dropped.
It has no idea what to do about it.

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BUT, HERE'S THE OPPORTUNITY...

8.2x

Revenue. A MarTech business I was NED for, just sold at this multiple.

THAT IS NOT LUCK. THAT IS ARCHITECTURE.

THE MECHANISM

Why 8.2× happens.

Software margins + Product + IP + Recurring outcomes =

Valued on revenue, not EBITDA

SAME REVENUE. DIFFERENT ARCHITECTURE. 5–10× THE EXIT.

— THE BUYERS HAVE MOVED

PE has one question now.

→ The question they are asking me sounds like this →

FROM A LIVE DILIGENCE CALL, THIS MONTH

How defensible is content, really, with AI?

- A LOWER MID-MARKET PE HOUSE, TO ME, ON A LIVE DILIGENCE CALL

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The business. A European content agency. Low eight-figures revenue. Founder-led, independent, growing. I'm the incoming Chair.

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Their flag. This one question. Not margin, not concentration, not churn. Just this. The single thing that decides whether the deal happens.

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My answer. Content isn't dying. The old content agency is. Rebuild around automation and workflow, keep senior strategy at the top, and this becomes margin-enhancing - not margin-collapsing. Content will be needed more than ever. Just not made the way most people are making it.

So why has almost nobody done it?

→ The economics are proven. The tools exist. And still, most agencies haven't moved.

WHY NOW · THE GAP

58/31

58% plan to invest more. 31% admit they can't yet do it.

SOURCE - LLOYDS BUSINESS BAROMETER, 2026

The winners this year are not the ones who know. They're the ones who do.

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— WHY NOW · THE REAL BLOCKER

It's not belief. It's that it looks too big to start.

→ From the boards I sit on, nobody argues the change isn't coming. They freeze because “AI transformation” sounds like a moonshot.

So, how do you start?

→ The gap isn't belief. It's that it looks too big. So we make it small.

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— WHY NOW · MAKE IT SMALL

Find the one thing you do a thousand times.

→ Not the whole agency. One repeatable process, run over and over, quietly eating your margin.

That is your first loop. Everything else is a distraction until you've found it.

SaaS businesses never build on instinct.

→ Every feature earns its place on a roadmap.

Product Roadmaps need to become the centre of your new universe

Agencies never needed one. Capacity was just headcount.

→ That era is over.

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METHOD

Two roadmaps. Two different jobs.

01

Internal Efficiency & WOW

The roadmap that runs the agency itself — automation, capability and margin. Every bet removes cost from the engine or adds a wow the client cannot get elsewhere.

- Kills repeatable cost
- Builds capability you own
- Creates defensible WOW

02

External GTM Roadmap

The roadmap that ships value to market — products, offers and pricing the client pays for. Every bet is scored for revenue impact and sequenced for fastest payback.

- Scores every offer for impact
- Sequences by return, not opinion
- Ships, measures, re-sorts

THE METHOD

Prioritisation is the key to success.

Four steps. The same sequence a software team runs every cycle.

Quick wins, strategic builds, experiments, deprioritised. Ranked by impact over effort, every cycle.

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List every repeatable task moving through the business, lane by lane. Not what you think you do - what you actually do.

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How much margin does it drag? How often does it repeat? How close does it sit to the client outcome?

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03 **Score each one for effort.**
How hard is it to build? The best first move is high impact, low effort - not the loudest idea in the room.

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03 Score each one for effort.
How hard is it to build? The best first move is high impact, low effort - not the loudest idea in the room.

04 Rank, then build in order.
The list writes itself. You build the winner, prove it, then take the next.

Quick wins, strategic builds, experiments, deprioritised. Ranked by impact over effort, every cycle.

PRODUCT ROADMAP

What a good roadmap looks like.

Horizons, not dates. Impact, not activity.

Now

QUICK WINS · 0–30 DAYS

EFFORT CUT
Automate status reporting

HANDOFF FIX
Consolidate briefing intake

QUALITY GATE
Standardise QA checklist

Next

STRATEGIC BUILDS · 30–90 DAYS

VALUE ADD
Self-service client dashboard

LOOP BUILD
First delivery loop productised

REVENUE
Pricing model pilot

Later

BETS · 90+ DAYS

EXPERIMENT
AI-assisted proposal engine

PRODUCT
New packaged service line

Ranked by impact × complexity. Re-sorted every cycle.

70 to 9.

→ What happens when you follow the roadmap.

We mapped every keystroke inside a US agency.

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Every task. Every handoff. Every hour. For months.

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70

people in the content operation when we started

9

people producing the same output today

Just two on actual content production work.

That is not a forecast. It already happened.

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And it did not start with tools. Or layoffs.

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And it did not start with tools. Or layoffs.

→ It started with a roadmap.

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And it did not start with tools. Or layoffs.

→ **It started with a roadmap.**

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Roadmap two: what you sell.

→ The external opportunity most agencies are ignoring.

Cutting cost is only half the opportunity.

→ The other half is what you take to market.

AI makes it easy for anyone to build significant product value.

→ The barrier to product is no longer engineering. It is having the IP to encode.

You are already sitting on the IP.

→ Every process you have refined across a hundred clients is a product waiting to be named.

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VALUE LADDER

What clients pay for, over time.

01
Hours
Sold by the day, capped by headcount.

02
Deliverables
Packaged, but margins compress.

03
Expertise
Premium, but trapped in people.

DESTINATION

04
Product
Encoded expertise that compounds.

Case study: we ran the same scoring on ourselves.

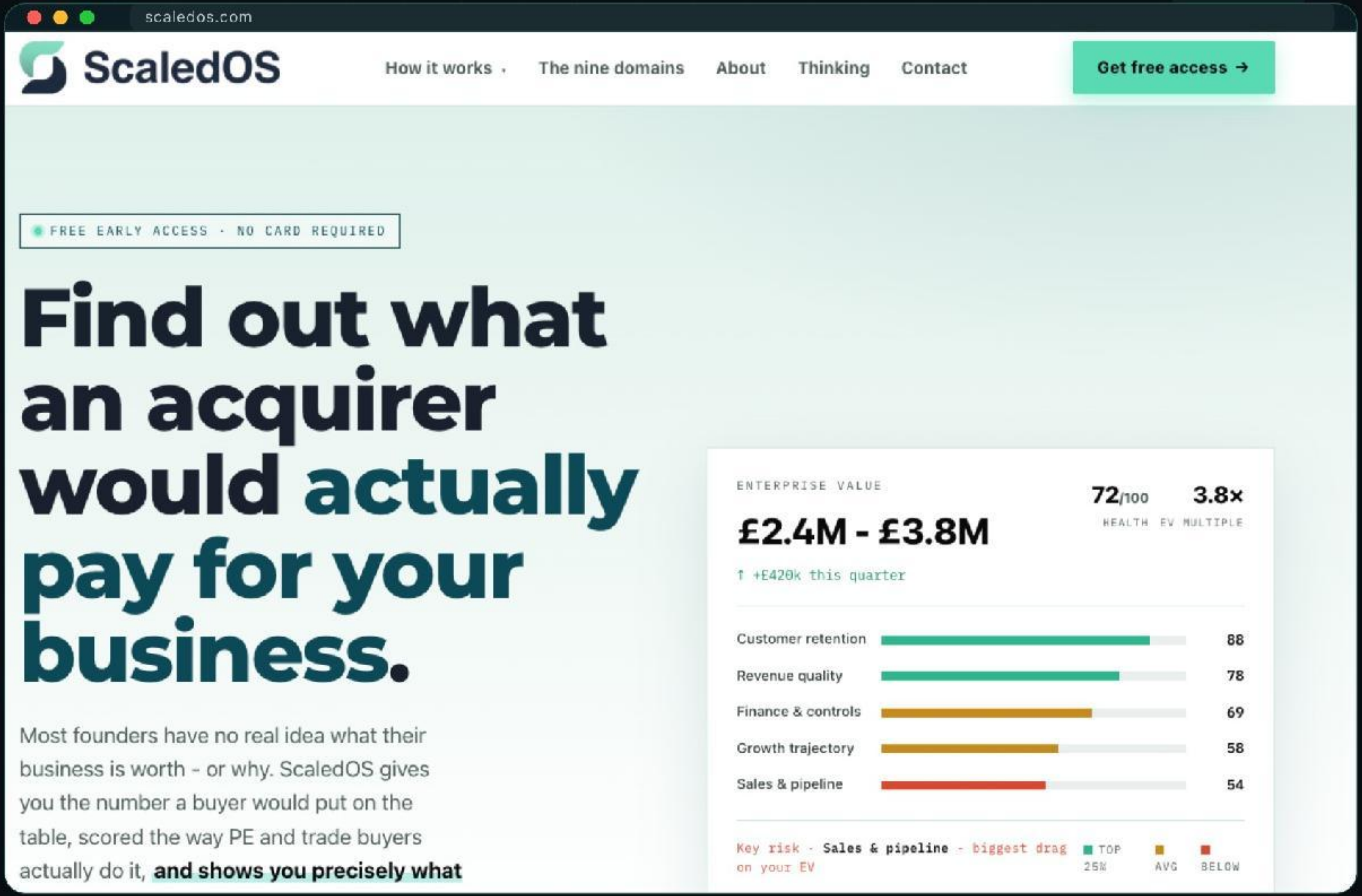
→ What Scaled sold by the hour became what Scaled ships as software.

PRODUCT

ScaledOS.

Enterprise value scoring and benchmarking for B2B founders — the diagnostic, productised.

TRY IT
scaledos.com



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BUILD

How we thought about it

TRY IT

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BUILD

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BUILD

How we thought about it

01 Listed every piece of expertise we sold by the hour

02 Scored each for market size and buildability — the same impact × complexity lens

03 Productised the winner: enterprise value scoring

04 Shipped it free, so every user makes the product smarter

TRY IT

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PRODUCT

Here is an agency that used it last week.

Real diagnostic output from a £4-5m agency business — not Scaled, an example client.

TRY IT

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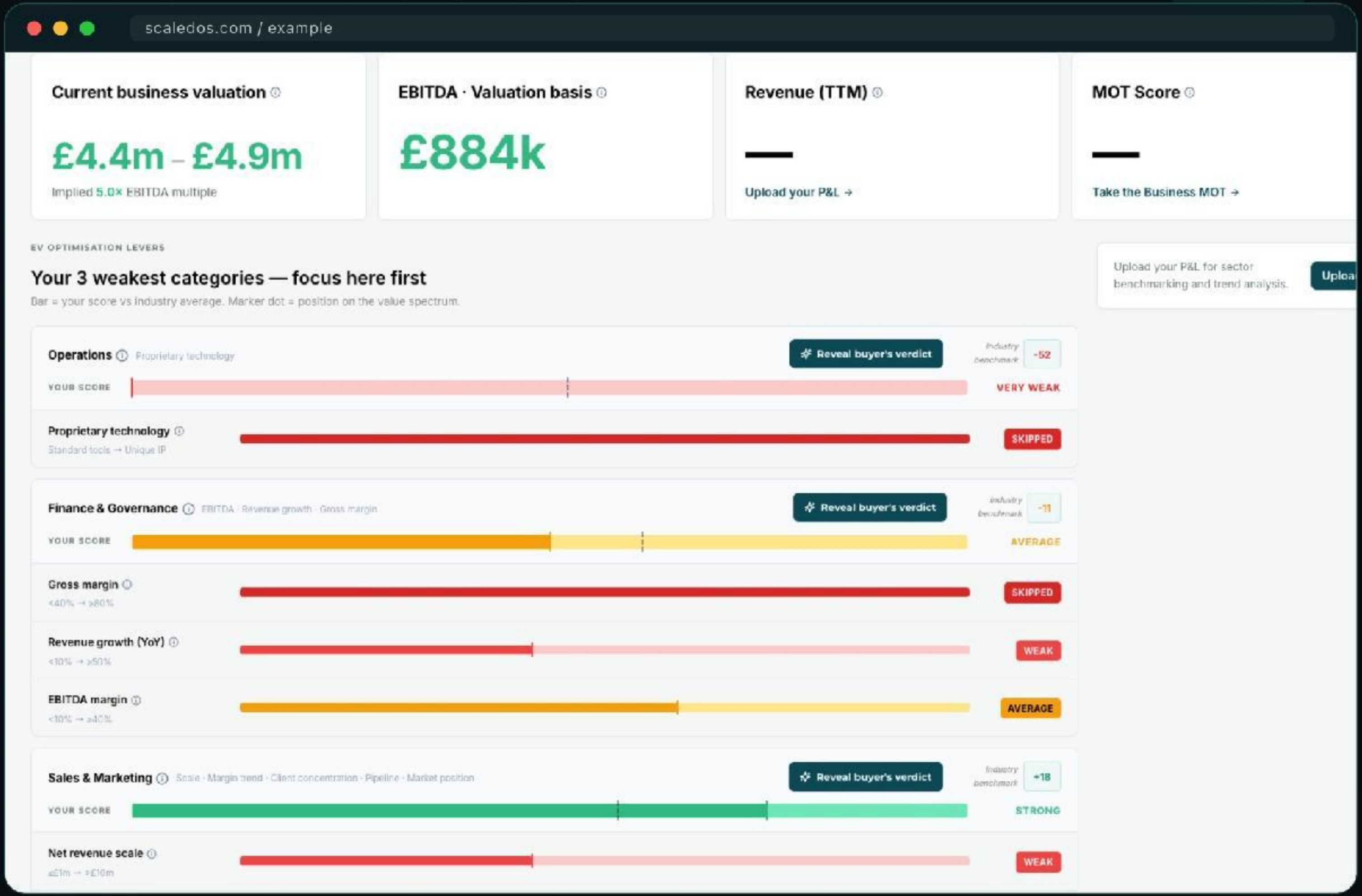

What to build to win.

→ The delivery mechanism for both roadmaps.

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A loop is the smallest repeatable unit of work that produces value.

→ Brief in, asset out. Data in, insight out. Enquiry in, proposal out.

LOOP DIAGRAM

A loop is a machine that gets smarter.

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LOOP DIAGRAM

Loops are built in a loop.

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A loop is NOT a workstream.

→ **WORKSTREAM**

Linear.

A straight line from start to finish. You do the work, you ship it, you move on. The effort does not come back.

⇄ **LOOP**

Repeats and improves.

Every cycle feeds the next. The work comes back smarter, faster, cheaper. Capacity compounds without adding headcount.

WHO BUILDS THE LOOPS

You don't need an AI team. You need a pod of two.

YOUR BEST OPERATOR

Knows how the work really gets done.

A LOOP BUILDER

Knows how to turn it into a machine.

The pod builds the loop. The loop owner keeps the outcome.

Every loop in your org chart started life as a conversation between these two people.

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There are two types of loops

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BUILD

There are two types of loops

01 A loop around a specific set of outputs

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BUILD

There are two types of loops

01 A loop around a specific set of outputs

02 A loop built specifically for a client problem

Loops compound. Headcount does not.

→ Every engineered loop adds capacity without adding payroll.

The agency of the future is a library of loops.

→ Loop by loop, service line by service line — until the whole business ran on them.

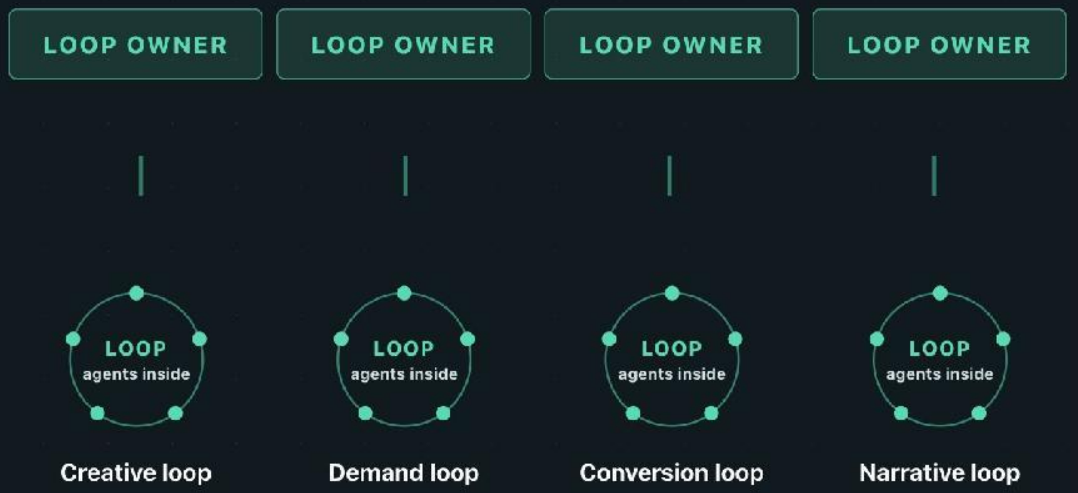
THE NEW ORG CHART

Senior people own outcomes. Loops own execution.

THE OLD AGENCY

People stacked on people. Value leaks at every layer.

THE LOOP AGENCY



One senior human per outcome. Agents inside the loop. No middle.

The pod becomes an owner and a loop. You do not get flatter by cutting people - you get flatter by promoting judgment and codifying everything else.

And you run it like a product business - a roadmap, not a resourcing meeting.

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Which roles survive?

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Which roles survive?

01 The ones closest to the client and the judgement

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BUILD

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02 The loop owner: one person accountable for one loop's output, quality and cost

BUILD

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01 The ones closest to the client and the judgement

02 The loop owner: one person accountable for one loop's output, quality and cost

03 The reviewer: a human quality gate on every loop, never the bottleneck

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How the future agency org chart could look.

Gone into the loop layer: account managers, delivery managers, PMs, junior executives, analysts, reporters, traffic and resource.

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Category, capital, biggest bets. One person.

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Own outcomes for a portfolio of 10–15 clients each. The operator half of every pod.

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The technical half of every pod. Rotate across Client Directors.

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The taste layer. Judges what the loops produce. One person.

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06 **Commercial + Ops Lead**
Pricing, contracts, finance. What was five people is now one.

Gone into the loop layer: account managers, delivery managers, PMs, junior executives, analysts, reporters, traffic and resource.

Roadmaps decide. Loops deliver.

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Your first 90 days.

→ The step-by-step. Start Monday.

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STEP

01

Weeks 1–2 — Map one service line. Every task, every handoff, every hour.

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STEP

02

Week 3 — Score it. Impact × complexity. Value or effort.

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STEP

03

Week 4 — Rank it. Your first roadmap. Quick wins first.

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So, what have we learned?

WHAT THE SURVIVORS ARE ACTUALLY DOING

Four moves. In this order. Every time.

From the boardrooms I sit in - not a survey, not a prediction. What the ones getting this right have already done.

Margin expands. IP gets named. Pitch win rate moves. In that order.

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Hire or borrow product and engineering. Put actual money on the table. This is not a side-project.

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04 **Move 4 - Beta, then roll.**
Ship it inside your best client. Prove it. Then it becomes the story you tell in every pitch after that.

Margin expands. IP gets named. Pitch win rate moves. In that order.

ONE US PERFORMANCE AGENCY

This is what the four moves did to one business.

A US performance agency I have watched go end-to-end through the ROI process this year.

$414,000
Annual salary cost saved on the first workflow alone

110 → 49
Team size, twelve months, same output

$29,000 MRR
Upsold to two existing clients on the back of new capacity

8-figure
EV impact with the right valuation metrics in place

Same client base. Same brand. Same office. A different machine underneath.

This is not a projection. This is one agency, this year, following the four moves in order.

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THE LAST MILE

You own the last mile.

- **The relationship**
- **The category knowledge**
- **The execution**
- **The feedback loop**
- **The taste**

Own the tool AND the implementation and you are almost impossible to displace.

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You are the last generation.

→ And the first of the new world. Nobody who comes after you will have both.

The most valuable position of the decade.

→ But only inside the window.

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THE QUESTION

If execution gets 10× cheaper, what do clients still pay a premium for?

— THE ANSWER

Someone to own the loop.

→ The taste. The judgment. The system that keeps getting better.

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THE LINE BEING DRAWN

Same market. Same tools. Same 24 months.

ONE AGENCY

Sells for 8× in three years.

ANOTHER AGENCY

Quietly closes, and never says why.

The only difference is what they decided the week they understood.

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This is that week. This is that room.

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"I back service to win.

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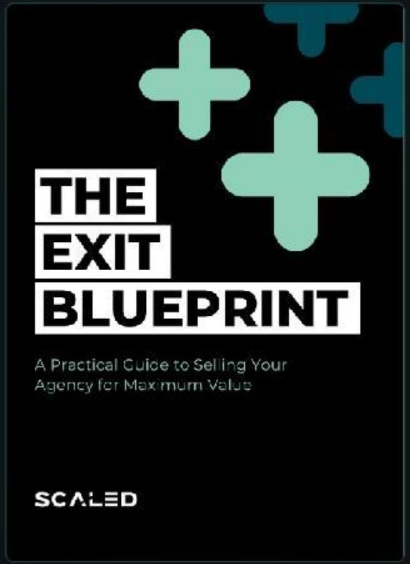
TAKE THESE WITH YOU

Two playbooks. Both free. Both yours.



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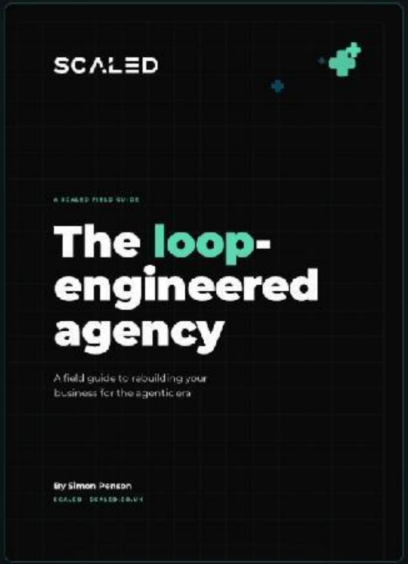

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AND THAT'S A WRAP

Thank you.

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