

The 100 GTM Failure Nodes

By Nick McGuire

A map of the patterns that weaken positioning, marketing, sales and the systems around them. Find the symptom, examine the evidence, then decide what needs to change.

I Incentive Misalignment

What the business rewards shapes what people do.

- 01
- Teams rewarded for activity, not outcomes
- 02
- Marketing on volume, sales on conversion: no one owns revenue quality
- 03
- Individual KPIs conflict with company-level goals
- 04
- Short-term targets override long-term system health
- 05
- Leaders unknowingly incentivize metric gaming
- 06
- "Good numbers" are safer than uncomfortable truth
- 07
- People optimize what they're paid for, even when it harms the business
- 08
- Systems reward speed over understanding
- 09
- Success is defined differently across teams
- 10
- No one is accountable for downstream consequences

II Metric & Measurement

When the dashboard hides the problem.

- 11
- North star metrics are proxies, not outcomes
- 12
- Metrics chosen because they were easy to measure
- 13
- Teams confuse correlation with causation
- 14
- Volume metrics mask declining quality
- 15
- Conversion rates look fine because inputs are noisy
- 16
- Metrics reward motion, not momentum
- 17
- Lagging indicators treated as leading signals
- 18
- Leadership trusts dashboards more than intuition
- 19
- Metrics are defended instead of questioned
- 20
- Measurement exists to justify decisions, not inform them

III CRM & Data Model

Where the data model stops helping decisions.

- 21
- CRM reflects how tools work, not how buying works
- 22
- Data fields exist without decision ownership
- 23
- Relationship context is flattened or ignored
- 24
- Lifecycle stages mean different things to different people
- 25
- CRM becomes a reporting tool instead of a decision engine
- 26
- Fields are added reactively, never pruned
- 27
- Data completeness valued over data usefulness
- 28
- CRM hygiene treated as admin work, not strategy
- 29
- Systems require manual heroics to stay accurate
- 30
- No one trusts the CRM, so no one uses it well

IV Sequencing

Doing the right things in the wrong order.

- 31
- Automation before understanding
- 32
- Scale before signal
- 33
- Outreach before ICP clarity
- 34
- Tool selection before process definition
- 35
- Campaigns launched without feedback loops
- 36
- AI layered onto broken workflows
- 37
- Optimization before stability
- 38
- Playbooks created before patterns exist
- 39
- Complexity added to compensate for confusion
- 40
- Growth pursued before trust is established

V ICP & Persona

When teams sell to abstractions.

- 41
- ICPs defined by firmographics alone
- 42
- Personas based on titles, not behavior
- 43
- Buying committees treated as single buyers
- 44
- Internal champions mistaken for decision-makers
- 45
- Messaging assumes rational buying paths
- 46
- Sales learns who the real buyer is too late
- 47
- ICPs never updated after real sales cycles
- 48
- Everyone claims the ICP is "broad"
- 49
- Fit is determined after pipeline creation
- 50
- Disqualification is treated as failure

VI Intelligence & Signal

Where context fails to become action.

- 51
- Outreach happens without situational context
- 52
- Signals exist but are ignored or diluted
- 53
- Intent data is consumed, not interpreted
- 54
- Teams mistake noise for opportunity
- 55
- Research is manual, inconsistent, or skipped
- 56
- AI outputs aren't trusted because inputs are weak
- 57
- Context lives in people's heads, not systems
- 58
- Signals don't trigger action automatically
- 59
- No distinction between curiosity and readiness
- 60
- GTM decisions are reactive, not event-driven

VII Outreach & Activation

Where relevance and trust break down.

- 61
- Outreach is list-driven instead of event-driven
- 62
- Messaging is disconnected from timing
- 63
- Cadences prioritize persistence over relevance
- 64
- Personalization is cosmetic
- 65
- Automation removes judgment instead of augmenting it
- 66
- Sales and marketing overlap awkwardly
- 67
- Prospects receive mixed signals from the same company
- 68
- Follow-up happens too late or too early
- 69
- Outreach volume masks declining reply quality
- 70
- Teams blame "the market" instead of their approach

VIII Feedback Loop

Where the business stops learning.

- 71
- Closed-lost data is ignored or shallow
- 72
- Wins are celebrated without analysis
- 73
- Messaging never evolves based on outcomes
- 74
- Scoring models never update
- 75
- Attribution is debated instead of used
- 76
- No one owns system learning
- 77
- Teams repeat mistakes confidently
- 78
- GTM doesn't improve quarter over quarter
- 79
- Retrospectives focus on numbers, not causes
- 80
- Systems stagnate while markets change

IX Organizational & Cultural

The conditions that prevent change.

- 81
- Truth is punished when it contradicts narrative
- 82
- GTM leaders shield teams from reality
- 83
- Political safety overrides system health
- 84
- Decisions are made to avoid conflict
- 85
- Complexity is used to hide uncertainty
- 86
- Senior leaders override systems emotionally
- 87
- Teams fear removing things that "used to work"
- 88
- Process changes stall due to consensus culture
- 89
- People protect turf instead of outcomes
- 90
- GTM becomes theater for stakeholders

X Strategic Drift

When the system falls behind the business.

- 91
- Systems optimized for last year's market
- 92
- GTM motions don't evolve with buyer behavior
- 93
- Trust erosion goes unnoticed until revenue drops
- 94
- Complexity accumulates without justification
- 95
- Temporary fixes become permanent architecture
- 96
- Strategy is revised, systems are not
- 97
- GTM becomes fragile under pressure
- 98
- Growth depends on heroics
- 99
- Teams forget why systems were built
- 100
- The company confuses momentum with health