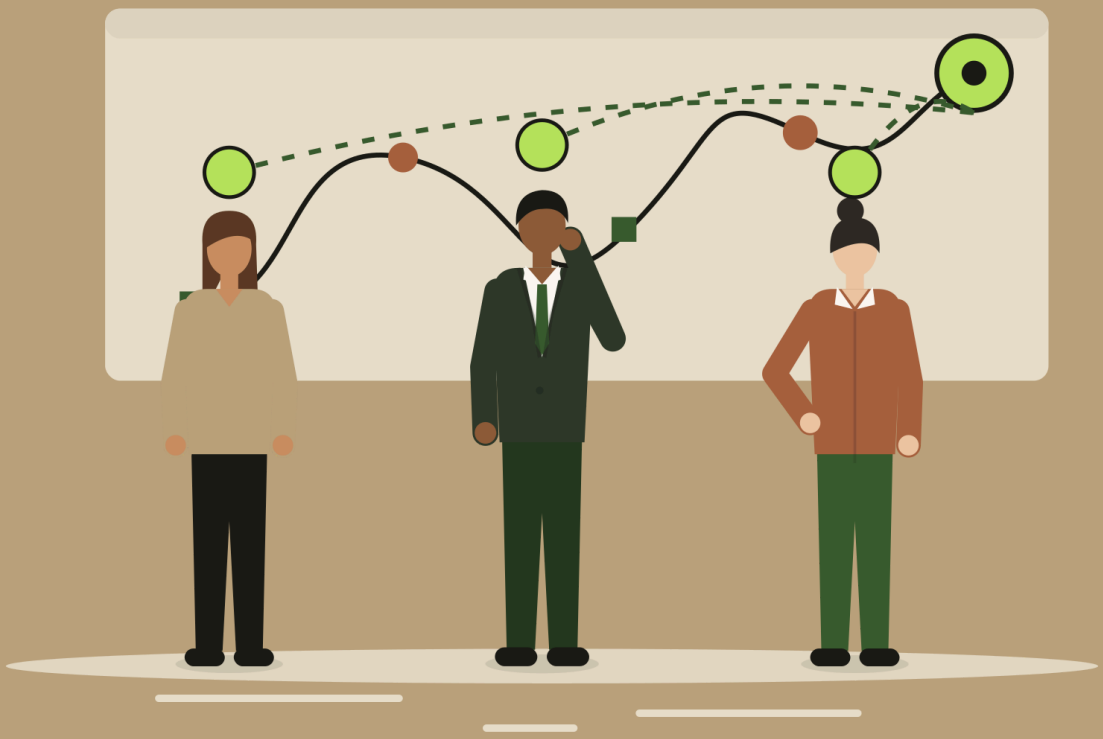
The Market Verdict™



INTERNAL CLARITY PACKAGE · PILOT EDITION

Protect what built you

For growing organizations where growth is putting pressure on the role that built the business.

SCALE Pilot Edition · v4.2 · October 2026

A methodology by Alchemic Graph

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How this works

Your customers have already decided what your brand is. This workbook helps you find out what they decided, before you spend more on what you planned.

Four ideas

Idea	What it means
The Planned Brand	The brand you meant to build. A claim.
The Real Brand	The role customers actually give you, shown by what they do. The verdict.
Signals	Customer behavior that does not fit the plan. The evidence of the gap.
Prove it wrong first	Before you look at evidence, write down what would show your belief is wrong.

Two rules

Answer alone first. Write your answers before anyone influences you, and before you see anyone else's. Disagreement you never hear about is the most useful thing this workbook finds.

Behavior beats belief. What customers do is the strongest evidence. What they say without being asked is good. What they say when you ask is weak. What the team believes is not evidence: it is what is being tested.

Three steps

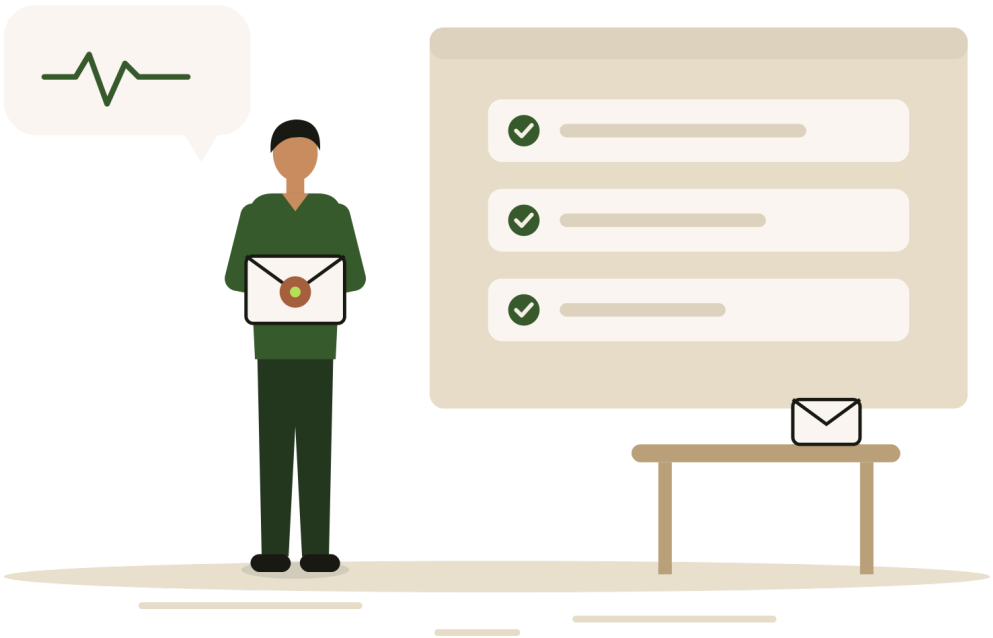
Step	Who	Time
1. Write down what you believe	The CEO or CMO, alone	About 30 minutes
2. See if the team agrees	Five people from five functions, each alone	About 20 minutes each
Scale questions	The leadership team	About 45 minutes
3. Check it against customers	The leadership team, with customers	Two working sessions

What you need: One hour alone for Step 1. Five department leaders for Step 2, about 20 minutes each. Retention, referral and win-rate numbers by customer segment. Access to your earliest customers.

Meet Meridian Field Services

Meridian Field Services is a fictional regional field services company. It has operated for nine years, has 180 employees across six regional markets, and recently won several large corporate facilities accounts. It built early traction serving property managers who needed a reliable, zero-overhead vendor. As it scaled into corporate accounts, its messaging shifted toward volume capacity and SLA compliance. Close rates in the original market have dropped. Its highest-retention customers are still the original property managers.

Meridian Field Services's answers appear in shaded boxes: a guide to what a useful answer looks like, not a template.



Write down what you believe

Six questions. Answer them alone, in writing, without checking documents or asking colleagues. The value is in your unedited belief: you will set it against what the team and customers show.

Write first. Then, for each answer, tick **Known** (there is customer evidence from the last 12 months, and you can name it) or **Assumed** (there is not). Question 3 describes a test, so tick **Tested** or **Not tested yet**.

Question 1 of 6 · also answered by the team

Who would miss us most if we disappeared, and what job do they hire us to do?

Describe them by what they do, not by age, title or industry. Name the job in one sentence. Not what the brand says it does: what the customers who depend on it most actually hire it for.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Property managers overseeing 10 or more properties. They hire us so they can stop managing a vendor. Replacing us takes them three to six months of retraining overhead.

Outdoor people who want gear that looks the part, at a fair price. The job: be ready for the outdoors without paying premium prices.
Our old core buyers still love us, but the growth is everyday customers.

☐ **Known** ☑ **Assumed** Evidence and date: sell-through only, not checked

Question 2 of 6 · also answered by the team

Name one decision from the last 12 months that moved us closer to that customer, and one that moved us away.

Specific decisions, not directions or intentions. If you cannot name the one that moved away, write that. It is a finding.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Closer: hired two senior field supervisors from property management backgrounds. Away: changed the sales deck to lead with enterprise capabilities. The moved-away list is longer.

Closer: the Trailmart deal (220 stores) and the Lite range.
Away: honestly, the repair waits. People are annoyed it now takes 6 to 8 weeks.

☐ **Known** ☐ **Assumed** Evidence and date: repair queue report, Sep 2026

Question 3 of 6 · also answered by the team

What would customers have to do for our current strategy to be wrong?

Name observable behavior, not worst-case scenarios. This is the question that keeps the rest honest: a belief nothing could disprove is not a strategy.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

If NRR in the property management segment drops below 100% for two consecutive quarters, or the referral rate drops below 40%.

If Lite buyers don't come back and buy again within 12 months, the growth plan is wrong.

☐ **Tested** ✓ ☐ **Not tested yet** How it was tested: Lite only launched in March

Question 4 of 6 · also answered by the team

Which customer type or channel is growing fastest, and does that growth fit the job in Question 1?

Name the customer type or channel, the behavior driving its growth, and whether that behavior matches the job you named. Growth that does not fit is either a new signal or a distraction. Step 3 decides which.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Corporate facilities directors. They hire us for SLA compliance documentation. That is a different job from the one property managers hire us for: zero overhead versus zero liability exposure.

Wholesale, by far. Most of this year's 31% growth is big-box.
Yes, it fits: these are everyday outdoor people.

☐ **Known** ☑ **Assumed** Evidence and date: revenue by channel FY25. Fit = a guess

Question 5 of 6 · also answered by the team

What is the one thing we can never compromise without losing those customers?

One thing, named specifically and operationally. Not a value. Treat it as a candidate until Step 3 tests it.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

A single point of contact who knows the property. Lose that, and property managers start managing us again.

Looking good at a fair price. If we get expensive, we lose the new customers.

☐ **Known** ✓ ☐ **Assumed** Evidence and date: gut feel

Question 6 of 6 · leader only

What are we currently explaining away that the numbers do not support?

Every organization has a comfortable explanation for at least one piece of uncomfortable data. Name the explanation and the data.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

We say growth accounts are the future. Retention says otherwise: NRR is 118% in the original property management segment and 89% in corporate facilities. Our original customers are expanding with us. Our growth segment is churning.

The repair waits. We say it's a good problem: people love the product.
And the 1-star reviews at Trailmart. We put those down to price shoppers.

☐ **Known** ☑ **Assumed** Evidence and date: never looked properly

Count your answers

Known: 1 of 5. Assumed: 4 of 5. Question 3: ☐ Tested ☑ Not tested yet

A mostly-Assumed result is not a failure. It shows how much of the strategy rests on belief, which is exactly what this workbook exists to find. Every Assumed answer, and an untested Question 3, goes into Step 3.

STEP 2 · FIVE PEOPLE · FIVE FUNCTIONS · EACH ALONE

See if the team agrees

The team answers Questions 1 to 5, the same questions the leader answered. Nobody sees anyone else's answers until all of them are in.

> SOLO FOUNDERS
>
> Solo founder? Skip this step and go straight to "Ready for your outside read?" at the end of Step 2.

How to run it

1. Five department leaders from five functions: product, sales, marketing, finance and customer service. The leader in Step 1 does not take one of the five places.
2. Give each person the answer sheet on the next page. They answer alone, without discussing it and without seeing the leader's answers.
3. Collect every answer before sharing any of them.
4. If someone discussed their answers, saw another response, or was briefed first, note it next to their answers. Keep their answers, but do not count them in the comparison.

TEAM ANSWER SHEET · COPY ONE FOR EACH PERSON

Name and function: Sam Okoro · Repairs & customer service · 16 Sep 2026

1. Who would miss us most if we disappeared, and what job do they hire us to do?

Hikers, hunters, people who work outside. They hire us so they never have to buy another jacket.

2. Name one decision from the last 12 months that moved us closer to that customer, and one that moved us away.

Closer: the 2025 Repair Report. Away: Lite. We can't fix it. I turn away about 30 a week.

3. What would customers have to do for our current strategy to be wrong?

If people stopped sending jackets back to be fixed. They are sending more than ever.

4. Which customer type or channel is growing fastest, and does that growth fit the job in Question 1?

Wholesale. No, it doesn't fit. Those buyers don't come back to us for anything.

5. What is the one thing we can never compromise without losing those customers?

The repair promise. Break that and we're just another brand on the shelf.

Compare the answers

For each question, mark each person's answer **S** (same as the leader), **D** (different) or **U** (unclear). Compare meaning, not wording: different words or examples for the same idea count as S. For Question 1, compare the customer and the job separately.

Question	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4	Person 5	Number of D
1. Who would miss us most if we disappeared	D	S	S	D	D	3
2. Name one decision from the last 12 months that moved us closer to that customer	S	S	S	D	D	2
3. What would customers have to do for our current strategy to be wrong	D	U	S	D	D	3
4. Which customer type or channel is growing fastest	D	S	S	D	D	3
5. What is the one thing we can never compromise without losing those customers	D	S	U	D	D	3

The rule: with five people, any question with three or more D answers is a gap. With fewer than five, every D is a gap. Leave out anyone who was briefed or saw other answers.

Gaps to take into Step 3:

Gaps on Q1, Q3, Q4 and Q5. Product, Finance and Repairs describe a repair-for-life brand.

Wholesale and Marketing describe Marisol's "style for everyone".

Q5 is the big one: three of us say the repair promise, not "a fair price".

No gaps? Your team shares one story. That does not make the story right: Step 3 checks whether customers share it too.

C1 · Scale question 1 of 4

Describe the customer who drove your earliest growth, by behavior. What were they trying to do, how did they find you, and why did they stay?

Not the customer you target now. The customer whose behavior first gave you your role.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Property managers overseeing 10 or more properties. They found us through referrals, never advertising. They stayed because they stopped managing us. Within six months their check-ins dropped to near zero. They referred colleagues without being asked.

Hikers and field workers who bought one waxed jacket and wore it for years. Found us through friends and the forum. Stayed because we fixed what broke, free, for life.

C2 · Scale question 2 of 4

Ask five of your longest-standing customers what has changed about working with you in the last two years.

Do not brief them. Write their answers down word for word.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

"The account manager changed twice." "Response time on non-emergency calls got slower." "You used to just handle it. Now I get a form." "The guys who knew our properties are gone." Five customers described the same drift in five different ways.

Called 5 customers from 2012–2016.

4 said repairs take too long now. 3 said the website "feels like a fashion brand". 1 said nothing has changed.

C3 · Scale question 3 of 4

How do your fastest-growing customers describe what they buy, and how is it different from how your earliest customers described it?

Use their words, not yours. Different words often mean a different job.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Corporate accounts: “vendor credentialing,” “SLA compliance,” “audit documentation.” Original customers: “vendor you stop thinking about,” “they just handle it.” One group buys operational coverage. The other buys peace of mind.

Earliest: "my only jacket", "built to last".

Fastest-growing (big-box): "a good-looking warm jacket for the price".

That is a different job.

C4 · Scale question 4 of 4

Using behavior only (retention, referrals, win rates by customer type), which segment most strongly supports your Real Brand?

Strip out what you hope. Compare the numbers side by side.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Property management: 14-day sales cycle, 94% renewal, 67% of new business from referrals. Corporate facilities: 68-day sales cycle, 71% renewal, 12% from referrals. Every behavioral number points to the original segment.

Direct, core range: 38% buy again within 3 years; 44% of new direct customers say "a friend".

Lite via big-box: 9% buy again within 6 months; 14% of units returned.

Core direct is strongest.

Check it against customers

Six parts. Each one moves an answer from Assumed toward Known, or shows it was wrong. Start with the gaps from Step 2 and the Assumed answers from Step 1.

Part	What you do
3.1	Original customers versus growth customers
3.2	Log what does not fit the plan
3.3	Test whether a behavior is a real signal
3.4	Prove yourself wrong first
3.5	The ten-customer check
3.6	Write the Brand Brief

3.1 Original customers versus growth customers

Put the customers who built you next to the customers you are adding, on the same measures, for the same period. Use the numbers, not your hopes. Where a number does not exist yet, write “not tracked”: that is a finding too.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Original: property managers with 10 or more properties, found us by referral, “the vendor we stopped managing”, 94% renewal, 67% of new business from referrals, 14-day sales cycle. Growth: corporate facilities directors, “SLA compliance, audit documentation”, 71% renewal, 12% from referrals, 68-day sales cycle. Revenue retention: 118% versus 89%.

Measure	Original customers	Growth customers	Period and source
Who they are, by behavior	Hikers, hunters, field workers. Wear it weekly, for years	Big-box shoppers, gift buyers. Wear it in town	CRM + store data, 2025–26
How they found us	A friend, the forum, a jacket they saw worn	On the shelf at Trailmart	Checkout survey, 2026
What they say they buy (their words)	“My only jacket”	“Good-looking and warm for the price”	Reviews, 2026
Renewal or repeat rate	38% buy again within 3 yrs	9% within 6 months (Lite)	Orders, 2023–26
Share of new business from referrals	44% of new direct customers	6%	Checkout survey
Sales cycle	n/a (direct)	n/a (retail)	–
Cost to serve	Repairs ≈ $18 a year per active customer	Returns: 14% of Lite units	Finance, FY26
What they would lose if we disappeared	“The repairs. Nobody else does it.”	“Nothing. There’s another one next to it.”	Ten-customer calls, Oct

3.2 Log what does not fit the plan

A signal is customer behavior that does not fit the plan. Look for three kinds: customers using you in a way you never designed for, a pain that keeps coming back, and customers starting to take the same job to a competitor. Write down what happened and who did it. Do not explain it yet.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Close rate in our original property management segment dropped 18% over 12 months. We said "property managers have smaller budgets this year." What it might mean: our pitch shifted to enterprise language, and property managers are not responding to it.

Date	What happened, and who did it	Kind	Sources so far
Jun 26	Repair wait reaches 6–8 weeks. 37 reviews complain	A pain that keeps coming back	Reviews, repair queue
Jul 26	Lite returns at 14%, mostly seams and zips	A pain that keeps coming back	Returns data, 2 retailers
Aug 26	People buy old core jackets used, then send them to us to repair	A new use we never designed for	212 repair intake forms
Sep 26	Forum: "skip anything that says Lite"	Customers going to a competitor?	Forum, 9 threads

Kind: a new use you never designed for · a pain that keeps coming back · customers going to a competitor.

3.3 Is it a real signal?

Run this on any behavior you have now seen from three or more customers. Answer each check Yes, No or Not yet. A signal is real only when all four are Yes. Until then it is a lead worth watching, and a small test you can undo is fine.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Property managers renewing and referring. Repeated: yes, dozens of separate property-management accounts across six regions. The accounts are what make it repeated. Renewal, referral and sales-cycle data are three measurements of those same accounts, not three more sources, and signing in different years tells you about time, not independence. Consistent: yes, the same behavior each time: they renew (94%) and refer. Costly: yes, they renew paid contracts and refer colleagues. Lasting: yes, 12 months of records. Whose: our original customer, not the one we are now chasing.

The behavior we are testing: sending core jackets back for repair after 5+ years

Check	The question	Answer
Repeated	Has the same specific behavior been observed in three or more independent customers or other independent sources? Multiple records, channels, or measurements of the same customer's behavior do not create additional independent sources. Observing it again over time informs Lasting.	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not yet
Consistent	Is it the same behavior each time, described specifically enough that someone else would recognize it?	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not yet
Costly	Did customers spend money, time or effort, or accept a switching cost? Asking for something is interest. Paying for it is cost.	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not yet
Lasting	Has it persisted over time, shown in records, not one person's memory?	☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not yet

Whose signal is it? Is the customer showing this behavior the customer you planned for? If yes, it supports your plan. If no, write down who it is. That person may be your Real Customer.

Our original customer, not the one the growth plan is aimed at. 7,900 different customers in 2025 (not 9,400: some sent two jackets).

Can we act on it? Answer this after the four checks, separately. It is a business decision, not a test of whether the signal is real. A real signal you cannot act on yet is still real, and still worth watching.

Yes, but only if we pay for repair capacity. Right now the wait is 6-8 weeks.

3.4 Prove yourself wrong first

Write up to three possible answers to “What is our Real Brand?” They must be genuinely different, not three versions of one idea. For each, write what customers would do if it were wrong, before you look at any evidence. Then look.

- Write the “wrong if” line before you look. Written afterwards, it is a justification, not a test.
- Mark each one: Holds, Wrong, Not tested yet, or Holds for one group.
- Interviews cannot prove a role wrong. Only behavior can. If nobody mentions something, that is a clue, not a verdict.
- If you already know the result, it is not a test. Write a condition you have not checked yet.
- If more than one holds, check whether each holds for a different customer group. Name the group. Two roles for two customer groups is a finding, not a failure.
- Before you choose, ask four questions. Am I favoring recent or memorable stories? Am I anchored on my first idea? Has the team already agreed informally? Am I only looking for support?

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Written before we split this quarter’s renewals by segment. A: The vendor property managers stop managing. Wrong if property-management NRR drops below 100% for two quarters. Result: NRR is 118%. Holds. B: A multi-trade vendor for corporate facilities. Wrong if corporate accounts renew below the original segment. Result: 71% versus 94%. Wrong as the primary role.

Your three possible Real Brands

	Possible Real Brand A	Possible Real Brand B	Possible Real Brand C
In one sentence	Buy once, repair for life	Style for everyone, sold everywhere	A heritage look, worn in the city
Wrong if customers... (write before looking)	Repairs fall, and direct customers stop coming back	Lite and big-box buyers don't buy again within 12 months	City buyers are rare in our own order data
What we found	Repairs +54% since 2023. 38% repeat (direct)	9% at 6 months. Too early to call	About 1 in 5 direct orders ship to city centres
Verdict	☑ Holds ☐ Wrong ☐ Not tested yet ☐ Holds for one group: _____	☐ Holds ☐ Wrong ☑ Not tested yet ☐ Holds for one group: _____	☐ Holds ☐ Wrong ☐ Not tested yet ☑ Holds for one group: city buyers

3.5 The ten-customer check

Take the answer that held in 3.4. Describe it in plain language to ten real customers. Ask these three questions exactly, and write down what they say.

QUESTION 1

“Does this describe a real problem you’ve had?”

Watch the speed of the yes, the emotional response, and the examples they give without being asked.

QUESTION 2

“Is this how you’d describe us to someone else?”

If they rephrase it, write their version down word for word. Their words may be better than yours.

QUESTION 3

“Does anything here surprise you?”

Surprise points to a gap. Write down what they added and check whether it shows up again.

Include a few customers who left or buy less, not only fans. What customers say when you ask is the weakest kind of evidence: use it to sharpen the words, not to prove the answer. An enthusiastic yes is not a purchase.

Ten-customer record

#	Real problem?	How they'd describe us	What surprised them
1	Yes. "The repair wait is the only problem"	"The jacket you never replace"	That Lite exists at all
2	Yes	"The ones who fix your stuff"	Nothing
3	Yes	"Built to last"	The new website
4	Sort of	"Good outdoor stuff"	Big-box. "Isn't that cheapening it?"
5	Yes	"My dad's jacket. Now mine."	Nothing
6	Yes	"Repair for life"	6–8 week waits
7	No. "I just like the look"	"A heritage brand"	Nothing
8	Yes	"The last jacket you'll buy"	Lite can't be repaired
9	Yes	"Proper gear"	Nothing
10	Yes	"They fix it"	That we asked

The Brand Brief

One page. Fill it from the evidence in 3.1 to 3.5, not from belief. It stays a working brief: after the Crosscheck, each field is marked Holds, Wrong, Not tested yet or Holds for one group. Agreement with the outside read supports a field; it does not prove it.

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Field 01: Meridian is the vendor property managers stop managing. Field 07: Not a national corporate facilities provider. That is a different job, with different Non-Negotiables.

01 The Real Brand The role customers actually give you, in one sentence.	Gear that lasts, for everyone who goes outside.
02 The job What customers hire you to do, in their words from 3.1.	Gear that doesn't let you down."
03 The Real Customer Who relies on you most, described by what they do.	Outdoor people of all kinds, direct and in stores.
04 The evidence The real signals from 3.3, with their sources.	Repair records 2019-26, repeat rate by channel, ten calls.
05 The Planned Brand What you set out to be. The distance between this and field 01 is the finding.	"Outdoors, every day": style for everyone, in 220 stores.
06 The Non-Negotiable The one thing you can never compromise, tested against the evidence.	Quality at a fair price.
07 What we are not The roles the evidence does not support. Named specifically.	Not a luxury brand.
08 What changes now The decisions this brief changes: budget, product, message, hiring.	Fix the repair waits. Keep growing wholesale. Review Lite in March.

How sure are we? (1 = almost no evidence, 10 = overwhelming behavioral evidence) 6 / 10

We would change our mind if customers did this:

If Lite buyers come back at the same rate as core buyers.

Date: 16 Oct 2026 Owner: M. Vance Re-read on (six months): Apr 2027

Keep it current

The market keeps moving after you finish. Three habits keep the Brand Brief true.

When	What
Every month	Review the signal log (3.2) at a team meeting. Add what you have seen. Never add an entry just to fill the month.
Every quarter	Ask the same people Question 1 again, alone, without briefing. A solo founder re-reads it alone. Compare the answers with the Brand Brief. Review the three numbers below.
Every six months	Re-read the Brand Brief. Does customer behavior still support it? Has the thing that would change your mind happened?

The three numbers you will watch every quarter:

MERIDIAN FIELD SERVICES · FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

NRR by segment, reviewed separately, never combined. Referral rate in the original segment. Whether the Non-Negotiable held: single point of contact, four-hour response, proactive flagging.

1. Repair wait, in weeks 2. Repeat rate: direct vs Lite 3. Big-box star rating

The independent read

Everything in this workbook is your organization reading itself. The last step is an outside read that never sees your answers.

The Market Verdict produces it blind: a Brand Intelligence Report for an operating company, or an Idea Intelligence Assessment for a startup or a new idea. It reads public customer behavior with no access to this workbook.

Before you see the outside read, save a dated copy of your finished findings: scan or photograph the pages and email them to yourself. Leave the originals as they are; write any later changes on a separate, dated sheet.

Crosscheck then sets the two side by side, claim by claim. Agreement supports a claim; it does not prove it. Where they differ, the better-supported evidence wins, whichever side it came from, and the reason is written down. A claim neither side can support stays a working hypothesis, with the next test named.

Included in the pilot. See your Pilot Guide, or themarketverdict.com

The Market Verdict™

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