

The best vendor is probably one you have never met

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Enterprise buying still runs on closed networks. AI makes an open, global ecosystem practical for the first time, and the enterprises that use it will see further.

Ask how a large enterprise found its last critical technology vendor and the answer is usually personal. Someone knew someone. An incumbent already had a seat at the table. An analyst report put the usual names on the list.

Closed networks have real strengths. They carry trust, and trust is expensive to build. But they share one weakness: they only show you the part of the market you can already see.

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A global market, a local view

>10%

From 50 million startups launched every year scales

85%

Of B2B buyers had prior experience with the vendor they chose

Innovation no longer clusters in a few postcodes. Capable vendors are being built in Lagos, Bangalore, Tallinn and Belfast as well as San Francisco and London. Close to 50 million startups launch every year, yet fewer than 10% ever scale.

75%

Of buyers personally knew sellers at the vendors they evaluated

7/10

Buyers said economic anxiety shaped their choice

Some of that gap is about product. Much of it is about access. 6sense's 2025 research found that 85% of B2B buyers had prior experience with the vendor they chose, and 75% personally knew sellers at the vendors they evaluated. Seven in ten said economic anxiety shaped their choice, often in favour of incumbents.

For an individual buyer, that caution is reasonable. For the market as a whole, it is costly. The enterprise misses better-fitted solutions. The vendor with a stronger product and no network stays invisible. The incumbent wins by default.

Why open was hard until now

Open ecosystems are not a new idea. Marketplaces and directories have promised them for 20 years. Most stalled at the same point: listings. A directory can tell you a vendor exists. It cannot tell you whether that vendor is credible, whether it has delivered for a company like yours, or whether it fits the problem in front of you. Professional networks came at it from another angle and turned to noise: everyone visible, nobody verified, every inbox full.

That was a human bottleneck. Checking thousands of companies across dozens of countries, languages and regulatory regimes needed more expert hours than anyone could afford. So enterprises fell back on the networks they had.

What AI changes

AI removes much of that bottleneck. It can read a vendor's track record, product documentation, customer evidence and market signals at a scale no team could match. It can compare a vendor in Warsaw with one in Austin against the same criteria. It can match a specific enterprise need to capability, wherever that capability sits.

That makes openness practical. Trust still has to be earned, but it no longer has to come only from who you already know. It can come from evidence: verified identity, proven delivery, peer validation and fit with the problem at hand.

For vendors, this changes the route in. A strong product from a 40-person company in Belfast can be seen by a buyer in Frankfurt on the same terms as a global incumbent, provided its evidence is real. Reach starts to depend on capability rather than on the size of a salesforce.

A few things separate an open ecosystem from a crowded directory:

Verification

Every member is a real business with a real track record. Openness without verification is just noise.

Matching on merit

Vendors surface because they fit a need. Paying for visibility does not move them up the list.

Human judgement at the point of decision

AI widens the field. Experienced people help decide who belongs on the final shortlist.

Why it matters now

In the AI era, the pace of change makes closed networks riskier than they used to be. The vendor that solves next year's problem may not exist yet, and when it does, it is unlikely to be in your contacts. Enterprises that rely only on who they know will keep buying yesterday's answers.

An open ecosystem turns that around. Enterprises see the whole market rather than the familiar corner of it. Vendors are judged on what they can do. Good ideas from anywhere get a fair route to the work.

Openness also gives the enterprise something closed networks rarely do: comparison. When a familiar vendor is measured against the wider market, the conversation about price, delivery and fit becomes more honest, even when the incumbent keeps the work.

This is what the Cognitive Economy is for: human expertise and AI working together, so the right enterprise and the right vendor can find each other wherever they are.