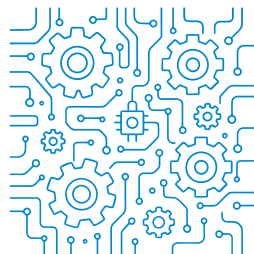


THE SEMICONDUCTOR GTM FILTER

When Narrative Strategy Works vs. Doesn't

By Heavyclick



Heavyclick

THE Reality

Most semiconductor companies believe their GTM challenge is technical proof or sales execution. Often, the real barrier is psychological.

This framework helps you identify whether narrative strategy can compress your sales cycles—or whether different approaches are needed.

THE FOUR-FACTOR FILTER

Narrative strategy accelerates adoption when ALL FOUR factors are true:

✓ FACTOR 1: FUNDAMENTAL CONSTRAINT REMOVAL

Your technology removes a physics-level or architectural constraint - not just incremental improvement.

✓ YES: Wafer-level optical connectivity
(removes thermal and distance limits of electrical)

✓ YES: Memory-centric architecture
(removes von Neumann bottleneck)

× NO: 20% faster processor using same architecture

× NO: Lower-cost version of existing process

WHY IT MATTERS:

Fundamental constraint removal = category creation opportunity. Incremental improvement = feature comparison (narrative won't help in commodity markets).

THE FOUR-FACTOR FILTER

Narrative strategy accelerates adoption when ALL FOUR factors are true:

✓ FACTOR 2: PSYCHOLOGY-DRIVEN DELAY

Sales cycles are long primarily due to risk perception and career safety concerns - not technical validation time.

✓ YES: "Your tech works, but we'll wait to see how it goes for others first"

✓ YES: "Great results in pilot, but leadership isn't ready to commit"

× NO: "Need 12 months of reliability testing"
(actual technical requirement)

× NO: "Waiting for our chip tapeout before we can test your solution"

TEST:

If customers believe your tech works but still don't commit → psychology problem (narrative can help)
If customers need proof it works → technical problem (narrative won't help until proof exists)

THE FOUR-FACTOR FILTER

Narrative strategy accelerates adoption when ALL FOUR factors are true:

✓ FACTOR 3: CONSERVATIVE DECISION-MAKERS

Your buyers are risk-averse, career-safety-conscious, and need internal justification for decisions.

- ✓ YES: Tier-1 OEMs, hyperscalers, automotive
- ✓ YES: Enterprises with multi-year design-win cycles
- ✓ YES: Industries with high switching costs
- × NO: Startups making fast decisions
- × NO: Markets with low switching costs

WHY IT MATTERS:

Conservative buyers need defensive narrative before they'll move. Fast-moving buyers decide on merit alone.

THE FOUR-FACTOR FILTER

Narrative strategy accelerates adoption when ALL FOUR factors are true:

✓ **FACTOR 4: LOCK-IN DYNAMICS**

Once adopted, your solution creates meaningful switching costs (technical, operational, or strategic).

- ✓ YES: Design-in cycles (7-15 years)
- ✓ YES: Process integration requirements
- ✓ YES: Ecosystem/tooling dependencies
- × NO: Drop-in replacements with no integration
- × NO: Easily reversible decisions

WHY IT MATTERS:

Lock-in creates hesitation (fear of wrong choice)
AND value (early adopters gain long-term advantage). Narrative work amplifies both dynamics.

SCORING YOUR COMPANY

For each factor, score honestly:

☐ **FACTOR 1**

Do you remove fundamental constraint? ☐ YES ☐ NO

☐ **FACTOR 2**

Are delays psychological vs. technical? ☐ YES ☐ NO

☐ **FACTOR 3**

Are your buyers conservative/risk-averse? ☐ YES ☐ NO

☐ **FACTOR 4**

Do you create meaningful lock-in? ☐ YES ☐ NO

INTERPRETATION:

4/4 YES → STRONG FIT

Narrative strategy will likely compress sales cycles 40-70%

Expected timeline: 6-12 months to see material change

Investment: High ROI (typical payback in 2-4 closed deals)

3/4 YES → GOOD FIT

Narrative strategy can help but requires careful execution Focus on strengthening the weak factor simultaneously

Expected timeline: 9-15 months

Investment: Moderate ROI

2/4 YES → MARGINAL FIT

Narrative strategy may help at the margins Consider whether other GTM levers are more important

Expected timeline: 12-18 months

Investment: Lower ROI, proceed cautiously

0-1/4 YES → POOR FIT

Narrative strategy unlikely to be the primary unlock

Focus on other priorities (technical proof, product-market fit, direct sales execution, pricing strategy, etc.)

WORKED EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE A: Wafer-Scale Optical Interconnect Startup

Factor 1: Fundamental constraint removal?

✓ YES - Removes thermal and distance limits of electrical I/O

Factor 2: Psychology-driven delay?

✓ YES - Customers say "tech is proven but we'll wait for others to adopt first" / "not urgent priority"

Factor 3: Conservative decision-makers?

✓ YES - Selling to hyperscalers, OEMs with long qualification

Factor 4: Lock-in dynamics?

✓ YES - 18-24 month qualification, multi-year design-in

SCORE: 4/4 → STRONG FIT

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in systematic narrative strategy

EXPECTED OUTCOME: Cycle compression from 24mo → 8-10mo

WORKED EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE B: Incremental Process Node Cost Reduction

Factor 1: Fundamental constraint removal?

× NO - Cost reduction at existing node, not new capability

Factor 2: Psychology-driven delay?

× NO - Delays due to fab qualification requirements (technical)

Factor 3: Conservative decision-makers?

✓ YES - Fabs are conservative

Factor 4: Lock-in dynamics?

✓ YES - Process qualifications create lock-in

SCORE: 2/4 → MARGINAL FIT

RECOMMENDATION: Focus on technical proof and direct relationships

EXPECTED OUTCOME: Narrative work won't meaningfully compress cycles

WORKED EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE C: AI Inference Chip for Edge Devices

Factor 1: Fundamental constraint removal?

✓ YES - Enables inference at edge vs. centralized cloud

Factor 2: Psychology-driven delay?

✓ YES - "Looks great but we're waiting to see market direction"

Factor 3: Conservative decision-makers?

✓ YES - IoT/automotive OEMs with long design cycles

Factor 4: Lock-in dynamics?

✓ YES - Software stack integration creates stickiness

SCORE: 4/4 → STRONG FIT

RECOMMENDATION: Position as inevitable edge inference transition

EXPECTED OUTCOME: Create urgency, reduce "wait and see" posture

WHERE NARRATIVE STRATEGY FOCUSES

When you have strong fit, narrative strategy addresses:

PRIMARY: Risk Perception Inversion

- From: "Risk = trying unproven startup"
 - To: "Risk = being unprepared for inevitable transition"
-

SECONDARY: Legitimacy Engineering

- Third-party validation signals
 - Ecosystem social proof
 - Standards participation visibility
-

TERTIARY: Career Safety Architecture

- Defensive language for internal justification
 - "Hedge strategy" framing
 - Pilot structures that feel low-risk
-

RESULT: Decision-maker psychology shifts from:

- "Why should we take a risk on you?"
 - "Can we afford not to prepare for this shift?"
-

WHAT NARRATIVE STRATEGY DOESN'T SOLVE

Be realistic about limitations:

X Cannot fix: Product-market fit problems

If customers don't have the problem you solve, narrative won't help

X Cannot fix: Technical immaturity

If product doesn't work yet, narrative creates disappointment

X Cannot fix: Wrong market timing

If market genuinely isn't ready (5+ years early), narrative won't force adoption

X Cannot fix: Fundamentally broken economics

If your unit economics don't work, narrative won't matter

X Cannot fix: Founder/team credibility gaps

Narrative amplifies existing credibility, doesn't create it

PREREQUISITE CHECKLIST:

Before investing in narrative strategy, ensure:

- ☐ Technology demonstrably works (lab/pilot proof exists)
 - ☐ Clear target market identified (know who needs this)
 - ☐ Some early customer validation (at least pilot interest)
 - ☐ Funding runway of 12+ months (results take time)
 - ☐ Founder commitment to systematic execution
-

NEXT STEPS BASED ON YOUR SCORE

IF YOU SCORED 4/4 or 3/4:

Narrative strategy is likely your highest-leverage GTM investment.

DIY APPROACH:

1. Read: "The Semiconductor Adoption Paradox" brief
2. Develop: Law, Enemy, Single Emotional Territory
3. Build: Legitimacy assets (lab tests, partnerships)
4. Execute: Systematic outreach with new framing
5. Measure: Cycle length, urgency signals, language adoption

Timeline: 12-18 months | Effort: 200+ hours/month

EXPERT APPROACH:

1. Discovery Sprint: Define narrative architecture (4 weeks)
2. Full Engagement: Systematic execution (12 months)
3. Metrics: Track compression vs. baseline

Timeline: 6-12 months | Investment: \$200K-400K

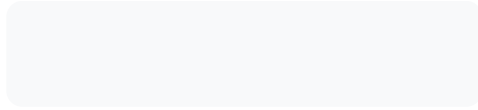
IF YOU SCORED 2/4 or lower:

Focus on strengthening fundamental factors before narrative work:

- Build more technical proof
- Find faster-moving customer segments
- Simplify integration story
- Address product-market fit questions

Revisit narrative strategy in 6-12 months once foundations are stronger.

ABOUT THIS FRAMEWORK



Based on analysis of 50+ semiconductor startups and 100+ customer interviews across photonics, advanced packaging, AI compute, and novel architectures.

Created by Heavyclick We help category-creating semiconductor companies engineer the perception that makes adoption inevitable.

Questions? divine@heavyclick.site | [Calendar](#) | [Heavyclick.space](#)

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