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Data monetization strategy: Starting the data monetization journey

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Beyond the blockbuster data deal

Why most companies may create more durable value through packaged insights and expert validation services than through one-off or even recurring raw-data deals

Blockbuster licensing deals have caught the attention of executives across industries. Headlines featuring major partnerships between frontier artificial intelligence (AI) labs and data owners reinforce a compelling narrative: Proprietary data can be quickly monetized at massive scale. But for most enterprises, that narrative is not just incomplete, it is directionally incorrect. The real opportunity may be quieter, more practical, and ultimately more durable: Not selling raw data in one-off deals, but transforming it into repeatable, high-value products and services that solve specific problems for specific buyers.

That reframing matters. The central question is no longer whether data has value. The real question is: ***Is my data valuable enough to external buyers to establish a new data monetization business model?*** Once that question is on the table, the next questions become practical: ***Which buyer has the clearest unmet need, what product form would solve it, and what capabilities are required to deliver it repeatedly?*** For most companies, the more monetizable path is not selling raw core data in deals worth hundreds of millions. It is building niche-specific offerings such as packaged insights (leveraging processed data to generate insights used for business decisions), expert validation services (sourcing human beings with niche subject expertise to validate AI model outputs, label data, etc.), and recurring data sets (refreshed and stable data delivered on a repeatable cadence for buyers to analyze). These offerings need to be designed for speed, auditability, integration, and legal defensibility.

The AI licensing boom has changed attention *faster* than it has changed the market

While AI data licensing headlines that continue into 2026 are flashy, most companies will not be able to imitate these visible transactions. Companies should determine the unique qualities of their proprietary data and understand the demand for these unique characteristics.

AI has moved data monetization from an adjacent topic to an executive conversation. For years, leaders have heard some version of the same promise: Proprietary data has value. Agentic and Generative AI have made the monetization question feel immediate for large AI licensing deals. Deloitte's 2026 Global Technology Leadership Study of 662 C-suite-level executives finds that C-level tech leaders' top priority is driving business value from data and AI. In 2023, the same survey found that data monetization ranked sixth out of seven priority areas. Yet priorities often lack an actionable execution plan. The conversation has shifted from what the value of data is to how to extract its value. That starts with understanding what makes your data unique and valuable to buyers.

The buyer lens *matters* as much as the data set

A better way to evaluate the opportunity is to start with what is valuable to a buyer before anchoring on the data asset. Business intelligence and functional teams often gravitate toward packaged insights and recurring data sets because they need grounded, repeatable signals to support specific decisions. A buyer may not want a raw file at all; that buyer may want a benchmark subscription that compares operating performance against peers, a weekly demand signal, a pricing index, or an alerting product that surfaces anomalies early enough to act.

Product teams cut across more categories. They may use proprietary data to improve features, automate decisions, or personalize workflows. Engineering and AI teams often sit at the most operational end of the market. Those buyers care about task fit, schema discipline, ability to refresh, expert judgment, and delivery into systems. In that market, the opportunity to sell proprietary data is real, but it is fragmented and specialized. It is won through customer specificity and product design, not asset mythology tied to a certain company's size or brand.

This niche, fragmented market landscape creates room for new entrants, but they should understand their desired business outcomes when monetizing data. With that answer, the buyer lens changes the starting point of the monetization strategy. The question should not be: ***What data do we own?*** The question should be: ***Whose workflow can we improve, and what form of product will that buyer actually buy?*** Companies that begin with the asset often overestimate the market. Companies that begin with the buyer are more likely to find the niche where they can win.

A data monetization strategic *choice cascade*

A framework for organizing strategic questions for data monetization

Five linked choices can help leaders translate a broad monetization ambition into a focused market strategy.

Winning aspiration

- What role should data monetization play in the growth agenda?
- What would winning look like beyond a one-off licensing deal?
- What revenue, margin, or strategic differentiation should the effort create?

Where will we play?

- Which buyer groups have the clearest unmet need?
- Which product types fit our data best: recurring data sets, packaged insights, expert capacity, or data-powered features?
- Which industries, functions, and use cases are most winnable first?

How will we win?

- What is genuinely distinctive about our data: recency, provenance, coverage, workflow fit, or expert judgment?
- What product form solves the buyer's problem better than raw data alone?
- How will we compete against incumbents, generic providers, or internal build options?

What capabilities must we have?

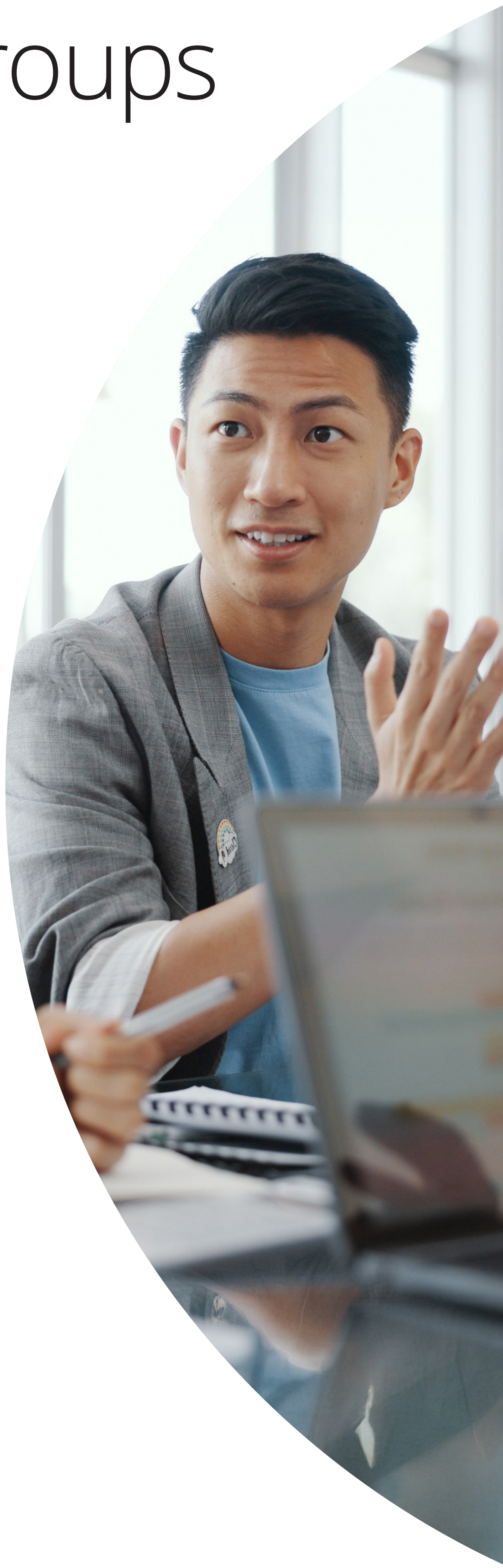
- What rights, governance, quality, and packaging disciplines are required?
- What delivery, tooling, and integration capabilities must be built?
- What are the new sales and contracting motions needed?
- How do we build the right security, cyber, and legal risk controls into the business?

What management systems do we need?

- How will we prioritize use cases and stage investment?
- How will we align incentives across the core business and the monetization offer relative to other businesses?
- How will we measure adoption, renewal, margin, and strategic value?

Common *myths* when choosing key buyer groups

Our experience has illuminated perceptions or "myths" that clients commonly articulate that get in the way of maximizing the value of their data.



The most visible market is not the default market

The first myth of data monetization in the AI era is that the biggest opportunity is selling data to frontier labs and model makers. That can be true, but only under a narrow set of conditions. Frontier model buyers tend to value assets that are unusually difficult to re-create, continuously refreshed, legally licensable, and distinct enough to improve model training, retrieval, or evaluation. Most enterprises do not hold data with that profile, and even when they do, buyers still expect clear rights, reliable structure, and operational delivery.

The second myth is that data that is proprietary and a competitive differentiator internally for a core business model must also be valuable externally. Data's internal value and external demand frequently do not align, especially when assessing value to non-competitors. A data set may be essential to running an enterprise and still have little stand-alone value in its current form. Buyers do not pay because a data set is important to its owner for a different use. They pay because it closes a specific gap in their own workflow, a decision process, a product roadmap, or a model pipeline. That usually requires shaping: schema design, normalization, identifiers, refresh logic, rights management, quality thresholds, delivery methods, and often expert interpretation or validation around the data itself.

The third myth is that historical data stores automatically carry the greatest value. Historical depth still matters in some cases, especially when a buyer is building or materially extending a foundation model, entering a new domain, or standing up a new AI product. But outside those situations, recency, provenance, schema consistency, refresh cadence, and ease of integration usually matter more than raw volume or long archives. For many buyers, the delivery standard is shifting toward governed sharing, auditability, usage visibility, and near real-time access. The practical implication is clear: Better operationalized data often matters more than simply older or larger data.

The practical conclusion is straightforward. The dominant myths—that more data is inherently more valuable, that proprietary data automatically has external demand, and that headline AI licensing deals represent the default path—do not hold for most companies. Monetizable value is not determined by data scale alone, nor by ownership in isolation. It is created when the right data is shaped into the right product, delivered at the right cadence, and aligned to a specific buyer need. The question, then, is not how much data a company has, but how to translate that data into repeatable offerings that customers will consistently pay for.

Five monetization motions explain where value is *actually* captured

Our experiences highlight five data monetization strategies in this new AI-driven data economy. Simple models still exist where raw data feeds are sold to third-party buyers. That motion still exists, and in some niches it can be valuable. But for most enterprises, it is the least differentiated mental model, not the most durable one. The more defensible opportunities usually come from productizing data more deliberately.

1. **Raw data feeds for third-party buyers.** Raw data feeds are the closest match to what many executives imagine first: external sales of data tables, files, or feeds to another party. This can work when data is refreshed, cleanly structured, contractually licensable, and difficult to source elsewhere. But it is also the motion most exposed to commoditization, pricing pressure, and substitution, especially when the data is historical, weakly differentiated, or hard to operationalize. For most companies, raw-data sales are the starting mental model, not the end-state strategy.

2. **Recurring data sets.** Recurring data sets are more durable because the product is not a one-time handoff. It is a governed, refreshed data asset delivered on a reliable cadence with stable schema and integration-ready access. These products are valuable when buyers want thousands to millions of rows they can analyze within their own workflows. The recurring refresh, not just the existence of the data, is what creates value.

3. **Packaged insights.** Packaged insights are often the stronger external opportunity because the product is decision-ready rather than data-heavy. The offer may be a benchmark, trend view, demand signal, pricing indicator, market alert, or grounded recommendation. The buyer is not paying to wrangle data. The buyer is paying for clarity, speed, and confidence in a decision.

4. **Packaged expert capacity.** Packaged expert capacity has become especially important in the AI era. Here the product is a repeatable service built around custom data generation, labeling, validation, or expert judgment. The buyer is not purchasing a static asset; the buyer is purchasing a fast, fit-for-purpose capability. Companies with human-generated data, expert workflows, or access to sometimes even PhD-level domain specialists who can label and validate at scale are often best positioned to offer this motion.

5. **Data-powered products.** Data-powered products create value when the data becomes part of an experience or product the customer uses repeatedly. One expression of this motion is using proprietary data to strengthen and differentiate an existing product by improving performance, stickiness, pricing power, or defensibility. Another is new product revenue: a fully built external product or feature powered by data, such as a real-time operational monitoring tool, an industry risk signal, or an AI workflow assistant grounded in proprietary data. In both cases, the monetization comes from the product experience, not from handing over the underlying data.

One more distinction matters. Channels and marketplaces are routes to market, not monetization categories in themselves. They can reduce friction, improve discoverability, and accelerate access. But they do not substitute for product definition.

The market is getting crowded, and the delivery standard is *rising*

This is not an open field. In many of the most attractive niches, competitors already exist: data platforms that package industry benchmarks, providers that sell recurring operational data sets, and AI-focused services that industrialize labeling, evaluation, and human feedback. The implication is not that the market is closed. It is that durable growth comes from picking a winnable niche and operationalizing it better than alternatives.

At the same time, the quality bar is moving up. Buyers increasingly expect ground truth, auditability, rights clarity, refresh discipline, and integration into production workflows. Those features are not peripheral. They are part of the product itself. That is why data monetization should be treated as a growth and productization agenda, not as a side exercise in data extraction.

Leaders should consider three decisions clearly. First, which buyer need and product type are most worth solving—recurring data sets, packaged insights, expert capacity, or a data-powered product? Second, which buyer groups, industries, functions, and use cases are most addressable given the company's data, permissions, and competitive position? Third, what operating model is required to deliver consistently—legal review, rights management, security, packaging, pricing, sales motion, customer support, and product ownership?

Those questions may sound less glamorous than a single licensing headline. They are also where durable revenue gets built: when an offering is aligned to a real buyer need, delivered in a form the market can trust, and supported by an operating model that can scale.

The default path is *not* the headline path

The AI era has made data monetization more visible, but also more complex. The most visible deals in the market are real, and for a small set of companies, they may be material. But they are not the default path for most enterprises, and they should not become the strategy by imitation.

For many companies, the more durable opportunity is to turn business data into repeatable products and services for specific buyers and specific decisions: a benchmark product for a functional team, a recurring data set for an enterprise AI workflow, a human-enabled validation service, or a data-driven feature that creates new product revenue. These offers may look smaller at first than a blockbuster raw-data deal. But they are often more defensible, more repeatable, and more aligned to what the market will actually buy.

That is the next phase of data monetization. It is not simply selling what a company has. It is productizing what a company knows in forms the market can trust, integrate, and use again and again—and, in doing so, creating more durable revenue streams.

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