

MARKET LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

The Strategic Intelligence Gap

*What Private Equity Firms Are Missing
— and How the Market Is Responding*

A market landscape analysis examining strategic intelligence options available to middle-market PE firms, the structural limitations of incumbent approaches, and an emerging model for continuous portfolio intelligence.

Executive Summary

Middle market private equity firms operate under a consistent tension: investment and portfolio decisions require timely, synthesized strategic intelligence, but the market has historically offered only two options — expensive, slow consulting engagements or raw data platforms that shift the analytical burden back onto the firm.

This paper examines the current landscape of strategic intelligence providers available to PE firms, identifies the structural gaps in incumbent offerings, and profiles an emerging model — continuous, platform-driven intelligence — that a small number of specialized PE advisories are beginning to offer.

Key Findings

- Large-cap consultancies deliver high-quality analysis but rarely within the timeline of a live deal or board cycle.
 - Data platforms provide raw information at scale but require significant internal resources to convert into actionable intelligence.
 - The market has lacked a category that combines the analytical depth of consulting with the pace and continuity of a subscription model.
 - A small number of specialized PE advisories have begun offering continuous strategic intelligence as a managed service, representing a structural shift in how portfolio intelligence can be sourced.
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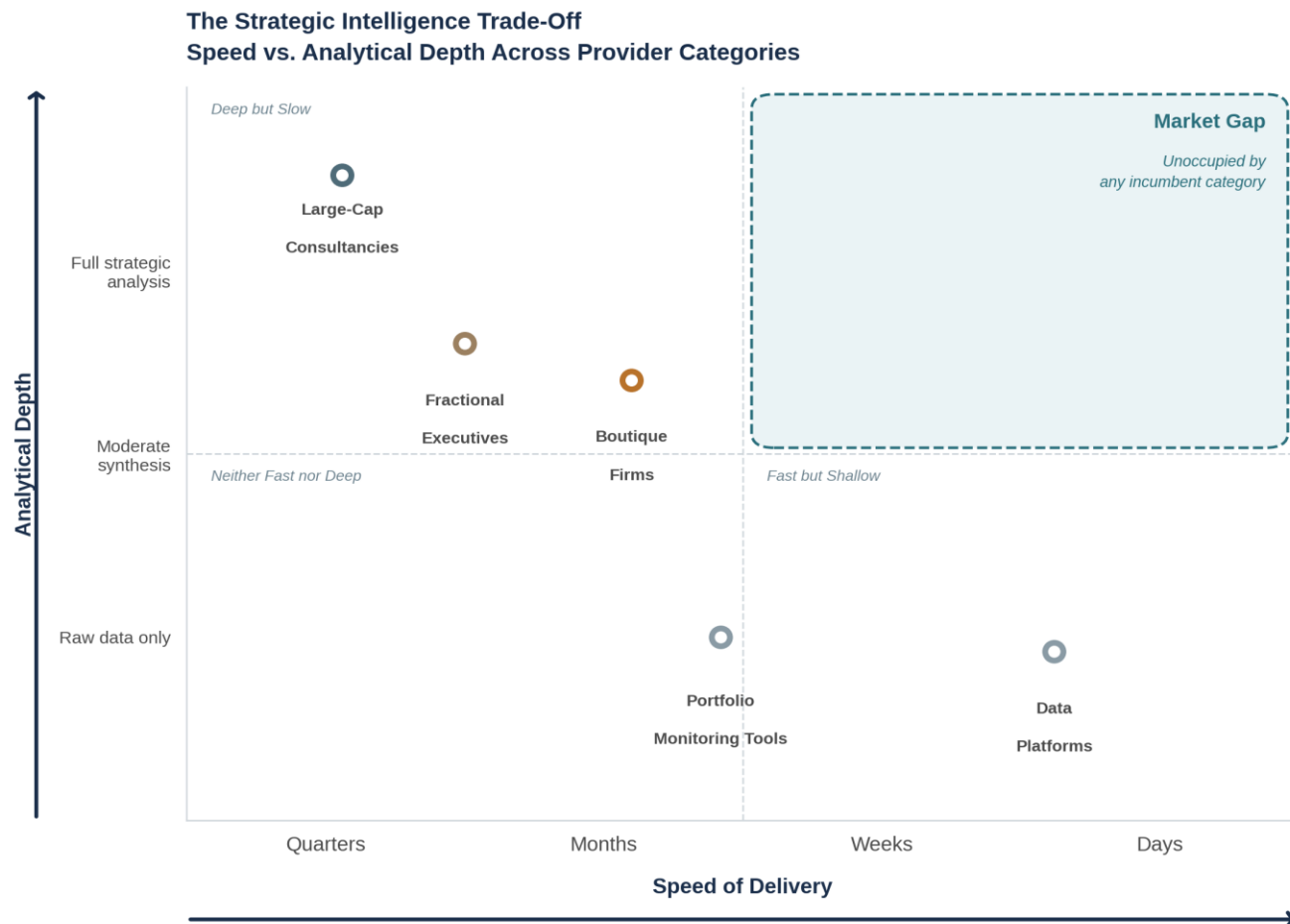


Figure 1. The strategic intelligence trade-off: speed of delivery vs. analytical depth across provider categories. The upper-right quadrant — fast and deep — remains largely unoccupied by incumbent providers.

The Problem: Strategic Intelligence in PE Today

The pace of private equity has accelerated. Deal timelines are compressed, portfolio companies require closer monitoring across more variables, and competitive dynamics in target sectors shift faster than annual or semi-annual reviews can capture.

Against this backdrop, the intelligence needs of a middle market PE firm — defined here as firms whose portfolio companies generate between \$10M and \$200M in annual revenue — have evolved considerably:

- Deal teams need rapid commercial analysis — often within days of exclusivity — to support IC presentations and identify red flags before capital is committed.
- Portfolio management teams need ongoing market visibility across multiple companies simultaneously, not point-in-time snapshots separated by quarterly board meetings.
- Operating partners need sector intelligence that is specific enough to be actionable, not generalized industry commentary.

The challenge is that these needs have not been well-served by the existing market. Deal-stage due diligence and portfolio monitoring have largely been treated as separate problems requiring

separate vendors, and neither category has adequately addressed the need for continuous, synthesized strategic intelligence at a price point accessible to firms with strained internal resources.

“Intelligence delayed is intelligence that no longer serves the decision it was meant to inform.”

The gap between when PE firms need strategic analysis and when the market can deliver it has been largely overlooked — until recently.

The Current Market: What PE Firms Are Working With

The table below summarizes the primary categories of strategic intelligence providers currently available to middle market PE firms, along with representative cost, turnaround, and coverage characteristics.

Provider Type	Cost	Turnaround	Analysis Depth	Coverage Model
Large-Cap Consultancies (Bain, EY-Parthenon, PwC)	\$50K–\$150K+	4–8 weeks	High	Project only
Mid-Market Boutiques (TBM, Next Level, W2 Strategy)	\$15K–\$75K	3–8 weeks	Moderate	Project only
Data Platforms (PitchBook, CB Insights)	\$12K–\$60K+/yr	Self-serve	Low (raw data)	Subscription
Portfolio Monitoring Tools (Chronograph, Standard Metrics)	\$15K–\$40K/yr	Continuous	Low (operational)	Subscription
Fractional Executives / Operating Partners	\$15K–\$40K/mo	Varies	Moderate	Project/retainer
Continuous Intelligence Advisories (e.g., NorthShift)	\$9K–\$33K/mo	3–5 days*	High (synthesized)	Subscription

* For discrete intelligence deliverables using platform-enabled analysis



Figure 2. How providers cover the PE intelligence lifecycle — engagement model, turnaround, and continuity by category.

What the Data Tells Us

Several structural patterns emerge from this landscape:

- Speed and depth are inversely correlated in most categories. Providers who deliver high-quality analysis — large-cap consultancies and mid-market boutiques — do so on timelines that frequently miss deal windows or board cycles.
- Subscription models exist, but they cover operational data or raw market information, not strategic synthesis. The PE firm still bears the burden of interpretation.
- The market has no native category for continuous strategic intelligence — an ongoing engagement that delivers synthesized, decision-ready analysis at the pace of the portfolio.

This gap is not a function of talent shortages or market indifference. It reflects a structural limitation: traditional consulting economics require high per-engagement fees to support large delivery teams, and data platforms are built for breadth rather than synthesis. Neither model was designed to deliver what the modern PE operating environment increasingly demands.

An Emerging Model: Continuous Strategic Intelligence

Over the past several years, a small number of specialized PE advisories have begun operating outside the traditional project-based consulting model. Rather than staffing each engagement independently, these advisories have invested in proprietary analytical platforms that systematize the intelligence-gathering and synthesis process — enabling smaller teams to deliver faster, at lower cost, while maintaining the analytical depth that PE clients require.

The model has several defining characteristics:

1	Platform-Backed Analysis	Intelligence is generated through a proprietary system rather than assembled manually by a large team. All system-generated outputs are reviewed and validated by experienced practitioners before delivery. This decouples output quality from team size and compresses delivery timelines dramatically.
2	Subscription Coverage	Rather than re-engaging for each need, clients maintain ongoing coverage of portfolio companies and target sectors. Intelligence accumulates over time, creating institutional knowledge that improves with each engagement cycle.
3	Tiered Entry Points	Advisories offering this model typically structure access across engagement levels — from discrete due diligence deliverables to full ongoing portfolio coverage — allowing clients to evaluate the model before committing to deeper integration.
4	Integrated Scope	The same advisory that supports deal-stage diligence can transition to portfolio monitoring post-close, eliminating the handoff problem that occurs when separate vendors handle separate phases of the investment lifecycle.

The result is a delivery model that more closely mirrors how PE firms actually operate: quickly, continuously, and with an expectation that intelligence is available when decisions need to be made — not several weeks after the fact.

Practitioner Spotlight: NorthShift

NorthShift Consulting Group, a Philadelphia-based strategic intelligence advisory, is one example of an advisory operating in this emerging model. Founded by industry veterans with operating experience across Beringer Capital, Comcast, eBay, Google, GSI Commerce, Raymond James, Vanguard, and VSS — representing more than 80 combined years in PE-adjacent roles — NorthShift structured its offering explicitly around the gaps identified above.

The Platform

NorthShift's intelligence delivery is powered by A(i)scent®, a proprietary analytical platform that integrates dynamic market data with a structured diagnostic methodology. The platform enables the advisory to generate synthesized strategic deliverables in timeframes that traditional engagements cannot match — a function of systematized analysis rather than simply a smaller scope.

NorthShift is not a mass-market offering with limited understanding of client-specific nuance. A(i)scent® serves as NorthShift's internal delivery infrastructure, functioning as the analytical engine behind every client engagement. This distinction matters: NorthShift clients receive the output of a purpose-built intelligence system, not a manually assembled research package.

Service Structure

NorthShift organizes its engagements across three tiers designed to align directly with the stages of PE firm activity:

Engagement Tier	Pricing Structure	Use Case
Level 1 — Map	Fixed fee (1×)	Point-in-time strategic assessment: competitive landscape, market positioning, opportunity/risk synthesis. Delivered in 3–5 business days. Suited for deal-stage diligence or portfolio company baseline analysis.
Level 2 — GPS	Subscription	Ongoing market monitoring and strategic analysis for active portfolio companies or target sectors. Continuous coverage that accumulates institutional intelligence over time.
Level 3 — Sherpa	Retainer-based	Embedded strategic partnership. NorthShift team members operate as an extension of the PE firm's investment or operating staff, providing integrated intelligence support across the portfolio.

The tiered structure is designed with conversion in mind: a Level 1 — Map engagement gives a PE firm direct experience with NorthShift's analytical output before committing to ongoing coverage. This reduces the evaluation risk inherent in any new advisory relationship.

The A(i)scent® Advantage

Where a traditional boutique consulting engagement relies on consultants manually assembling analysis from scratch, NorthShift's A(i)scent® platform systematizes the diagnostic process. The result is that a lean team with 80+ combined years of operating experience can deliver at the speed

and comprehensiveness typically associated with teams many times its size — without the corresponding cost structure.

Evaluating a Strategic Intelligence Partner: Six Questions

For PE firms assessing whether and how to engage a strategic intelligence provider, the following criteria are particularly relevant when comparing options across the categories outlined in this paper.

Evaluation Criterion	What to Ask
Turnaround vs. Decision Windows	Can the provider match the pace of your deal calendar and board cycle?
Synthesis vs. Raw Data	Does the output require significant internal interpretation, or does it arrive decision-ready?
Coverage Model	Is the engagement project-based (resets each time) or continuous (builds institutional knowledge)?
Platform vs. People	Is analysis dependent entirely on individual consultants, or backed by a proprietary analytical system that accelerates portco diagnoses quickly and then turns to human experience to verify the outputs before formal recommendations are made?
Scope Flexibility	Can the engagement scale from point-in-time due diligence to ongoing portfolio coverage within a single relationship?
PE-Specific Experience	Does the team have direct operating experience inside PE-backed environments, not just advisory exposure?

These criteria are not specific to any single provider. They reflect the structural requirements that any strategic intelligence engagement must satisfy to be genuinely useful to a PE operating environment — as opposed to producing outputs that are professionally formatted but arrive too late, are too generic, or require too much internal effort to operationalize.

Conclusion

The strategic intelligence market available to middle market PE firms is in transition. The incumbent model — expensive, slow, project-based consulting on one end; raw data platforms on the other — has left a significant gap in the middle: continuous, synthesized, decision-ready intelligence available at the pace of an active portfolio.

A small but growing number of specialized PE advisories have recognized this gap and built delivery models explicitly designed to close it. For PE firms that have experienced the cost of stale analysis — a missed competitive shift, a portfolio company operating on an outdated strategic plan, a deal team working from six-month-old market data — the emergence of this

model represents a material change in what the market can offer.

The question for PE principals is no longer whether this type of intelligence is available. The question is whether their current intelligence infrastructure is keeping pace with the decisions they are being asked to make.

About NorthShift Consultancy Group, LLC

NorthShift Consultancy Group, LLC is a strategic intelligence advisory serving private equity clients. The advisory's A(i)scent® platform enables rapid, synthesized market analysis across the full investment lifecycle — from deal-stage due diligence to ongoing portfolio monitoring. NorthShift is headquartered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and works with middle market PE firms across the Northeast and nationally.

For more information: NorthShiftConsulting.com
