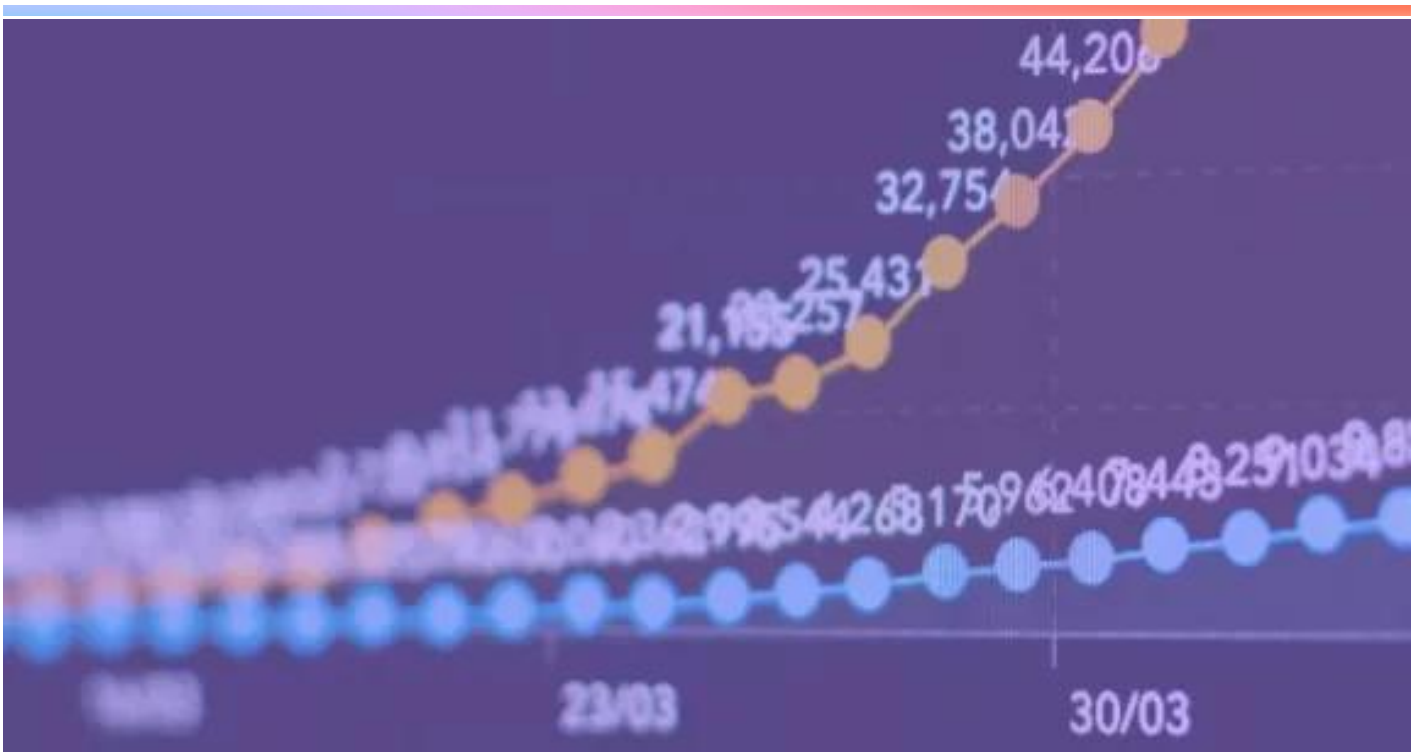


Trend detection: identify market shifts before they become obvious

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Those who spot changes in trends early on discover new market opportunities before the competition does

Companies monitor trends to identify new opportunities and adjust their strategy. But the greatest competitive advantage is rarely achieved by following a trend: it arises when you spot changes in trends at an early stage. These initial signals are often subtle and inconspicuous, but may mark the start of a fundamental shift in the market.

> ‘The truly important events on the outside are not the trends. They are changes in the trends.’
> **- Peter Drucker**

The first signals appear on the fringes of the market

Most companies focus their attention on their core market. That makes sense: it’s where the biggest customers, the best-known applications and the lion’s share of the revenue are to be found. However, this is precisely where new developments can be the hardest to spot.

Changes usually become apparent first in the extreme segments of a market: the largest or smallest products, the most demanding customers, exceptional applications or niche markets.

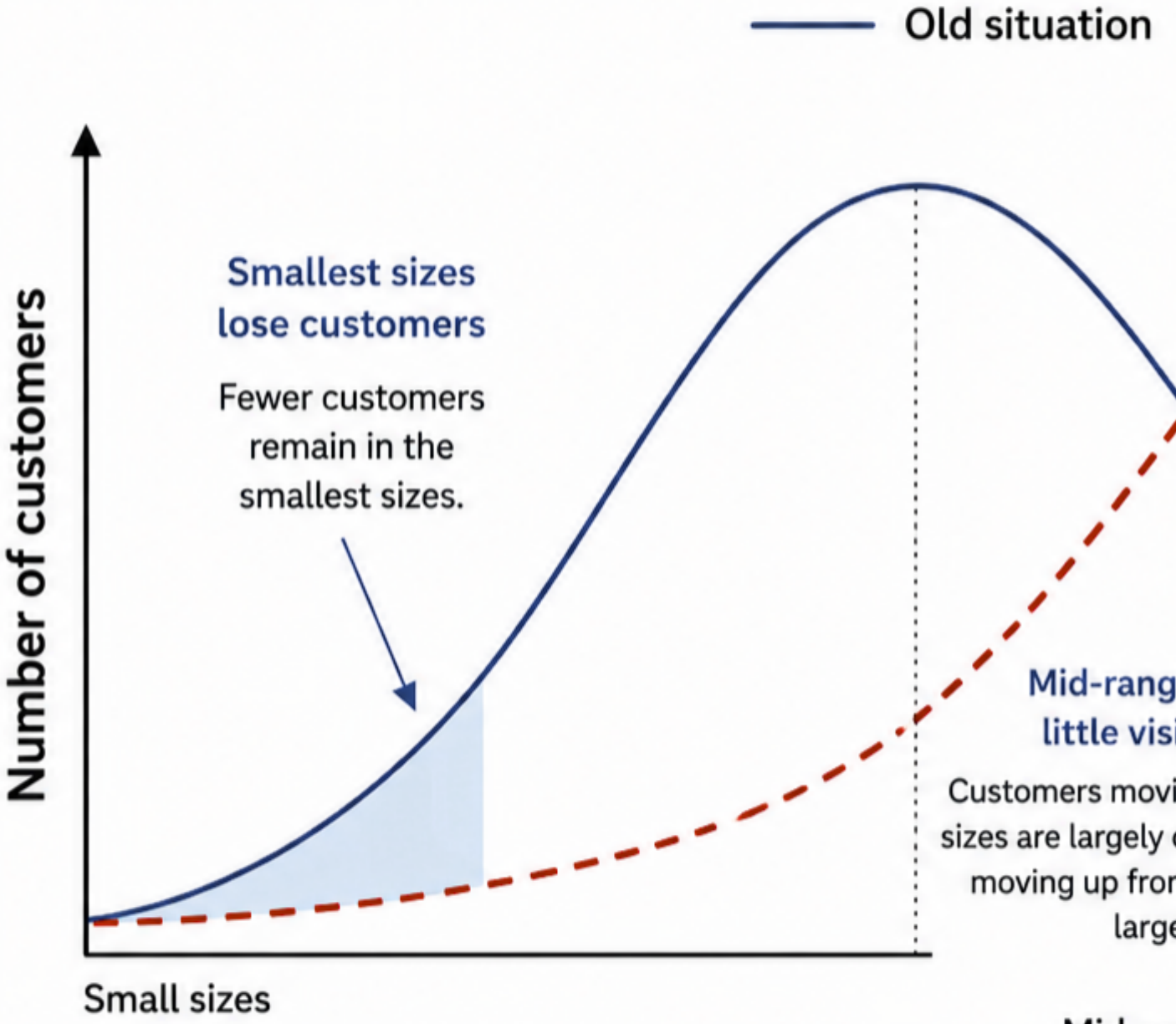
Why? Because small shifts have a much greater impact there than in the middle of the market. As a result, changes become visible at the edges long before they reach the wider market.

Three real-life examples

The clothing sector is a good example of this mechanism. Due to the rise in obesity, demand for larger clothing sizes is increasing. In the mid-range segment, this trend remains largely hidden for a long time because customers switch between sizes. At the extremes, such offsetting occurs much less frequently. The smallest sizes lose customers while the largest ones grow faster. This is precisely where the first signals become apparent.

Why changes become v

Example: shift towa



Decrease in smallest sizes
(first visible effect of the trend)

Climate change follows the same pattern. A slight rise in the average temperature means that extreme weather conditions such as heatwaves, droughts and floods occur much more frequently. As a result, manufacturers of air-conditioning systems or irrigation solutions often notice a rise in demand sooner than the average climate trend would suggest.

The same applies to population ageing. Higher life expectancies lead not only to a larger elderly population, but above all to a sharp rise in the number of people aged 100 and over. This creates new markets for products and services aimed at the very elderly, such as home care, mobility aids, adapted housing, remote monitoring and support for informal carers.

These market segments at the extremes are of particular interest for companies in search of new opportunities. It is precisely because they react more strongly to underlying changes that tomorrow's growth markets often become apparent here.

Small signals often herald big changes

The initial signals often seem insignificant because they are only visible to a limited group of customers. Nevertheless, they may point to a fundamental shift in the market. Organisations that recognise these signals at an early stage can invest before the wider market follows suit. This way, they create scope to develop new products, services or business models in good time.

Growth and risk go hand in hand

Extreme market segments react more quickly not just to growth, but to a reversal in a trend too. When a trend gains momentum, these segments commonly grow faster than the rest of the market. If the trend reverses, they also feel the impact most keenly. Companies that rely heavily on a niche market would therefore be well advised to keep a close eye on the underlying trends. Because a successful position today offers no guarantee for tomorrow.

Your own data often contain the early signals

But how do you spot such signals? In many cases, you don't need to wait for external trend reports to do so. The first indications are already concealed within your own organisation's data. Sales figures, requests for quotations, service enquiries, configurations and usage data contain valuable information about changing market needs.

The challenge lies in looking not only at averages or total volumes, but above all at what is happening on the fringes of the market. For example, ask yourself the following questions:

- Which product variants are growing at an unexpectedly rapid rate?
- Which unusual customer enquiries are coming up more and more frequently?
- Which applications are suddenly emerging in new sectors?

In the foresight literature, such early indications are usually referred to as 'weak signals': small, often subtle changes that may point to future market developments.

By systematically monitoring these signals, you can identify new opportunities before they become visible to the wider market.

From data to strategic innovation

Tomorrow’s signals can often be found in today’s data. The difference between a market leader and a follower lies not in who spots a trend, but in who is the first to recognise the change in that trend. Organisations that systematically analyse these signals build a stronger foundation for innovation and sustainable growth.

Turn trends into a strategic advantage

Would you like to find out which weak signals in your market are pointing to future changes? Sirris’ experts can help you turn trends, data and foresight into concrete opportunities for innovation and strategic insights.

Contact our expert

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