GO TO MARKET · A WORKING FRAMEWORK BY JAMES TUTTIETT

The Hackathon as the Front Door

One day, the client's engineers, their data, their problem. Working software and a sponsor by the end of it.

The most effective AI sales motion I have found is not a pitch. It is a day in a room with the client's own engineers, their real data and a problem they actually have, building something that works before everyone goes home. A slide deck produces a follow-up meeting. A hackathon produces working software and a sponsor who has seen it run.

Before: the three things that decide it

A named sponsor with a budget, who will be in the room at the end. A real problem chosen by the client, not by you, that is small enough to make progress on in a day and painful enough that someone cares. And data access and security sign-off sorted in advance, because the day is lost if the first four hours are spent on permissions.

During: small teams, spec first, ship

Mixed teams of client engineers and your consultants, three or four people each. Every team writes a one-page specification before touching code: what it does, what good looks like, what is out of scope. Agent-assisted tooling does the heavy lifting. The target is something that runs on the client's data by the afternoon, not a prototype on synthetic data.

After: the sponsor conversation

The day ends with each team demonstrating to the sponsor. The conversation that follows is not "would you like a proposal?" but "which of these do you want in production, and what would it take?". Scope the engagement from the thing that worked.

What it is not

Not a training day, not a showcase of your tools, not a hackathon on your problem. If the client's people are watching rather than building, it is a demo, and demos do not create sponsors.

How to use it

- Run it inside your own business first. Every rough edge is found by colleagues rather than clients, and you get an internal proof point.
- Keep the format identical across clients. Repeatability is what makes it a motion rather than an event.
- Capture the specification and the working output as the engagement's starting point. The hackathon is day one of delivery, not a pre-sales cost.