

**THE RISKS OF STANDING STILL:**

# How Delayed Commercial Infrastructure Choices Undermine Growth

What small and mid-market pharma companies need  
to get right before launch pressure hits.

# Introduction

**Approval comes through, and the first question is how quickly the organization can be ready to launch.**

In many cases, the answer is unclear. Teams are still incomplete. Key systems are waiting on budget approval. Critical pieces of the commercial infrastructure are not fully in place.

With tight budgets, priorities get pushed down the list and feel like the right trade-offs at the time. What gets missed is how those trade-offs start to interact as execution approaches.

Most of these choices are not wrong on their own. The risk comes from how they compound, often in ways that are not visible until the business depends on them. These patterns show up consistently in lean commercial buildouts.

The points of failure are predictable, and so are the decisions that create them. What matters is understanding where those breakdowns tend to happen and which choices drive the most downstream risk.

**Commercialization involves a wide range of factors, from market dynamics and access strategy to field execution and patient experience.**

In this article, we focus on how commercial infrastructure decisions support those broader efforts and determine how effectively the organization can operate at launch.

# Three Scenarios, One Underlying Problem

**Teams generally know what needs to be built. The real challenge is how long key pieces can be delayed before timelines close in.**

This plays out differently depending on where a company is in its commercial journey, but the pattern is consistent. Teams are making real-time calls about what to move forward with, what to delay, and what to leave partially built, often knowing those gaps will need to be addressed under tighter timelines later.



## The First-Time Launch Under Constraint

The first-time launcher is working with a lean team, limited runway, and a board that delays infrastructure decisions while waiting for clinical validation. In many cases, leadership already has a clear view of what the commercial operation should look like. The pressure comes from how long those priorities can be pushed before they have to be addressed.

Hiring gets delayed. Systems are scoped but not implemented. Vendors are brought in to fill gaps,

often without the internal structure to guide them effectively. Work continues, but it does not always connect across teams or systems.

There is usually a moment where the shift happens. The focus moves from building a foundation to a last minute scramble to get something in place before launch. Corners get cut because there is no longer time to do it differently.

**The shift happens when planning gives way to timing.**



## The Launch That Isn't Performing

The product is in the market, but performance is not meeting expectations. Forecasts were strong, and early assumptions held, but uptake is slower than expected, shifting the focus from scaling to extending runway.

Costs begin to come down in stages, first around the edges and then closer to the core. Commercial operations often move into focus because they carry visible cost across field teams, data, and systems.

This is where earlier choices begin to compound. The same capabilities being reduced are often the ones needed to improve performance, which narrows line of sight into activity and makes execution less consistent. Teams are left making calls with less context at the exact moment more precision is required.

**What follows is a gradual loss of visibility and consistency at the point where both are needed most.**



## The Build-to-Sell Strategy

The organization is preparing for acquisition and is intentionally keeping its footprint small. The goal is to maintain enough traction to make the asset attractive while keeping spend tightly controlled.

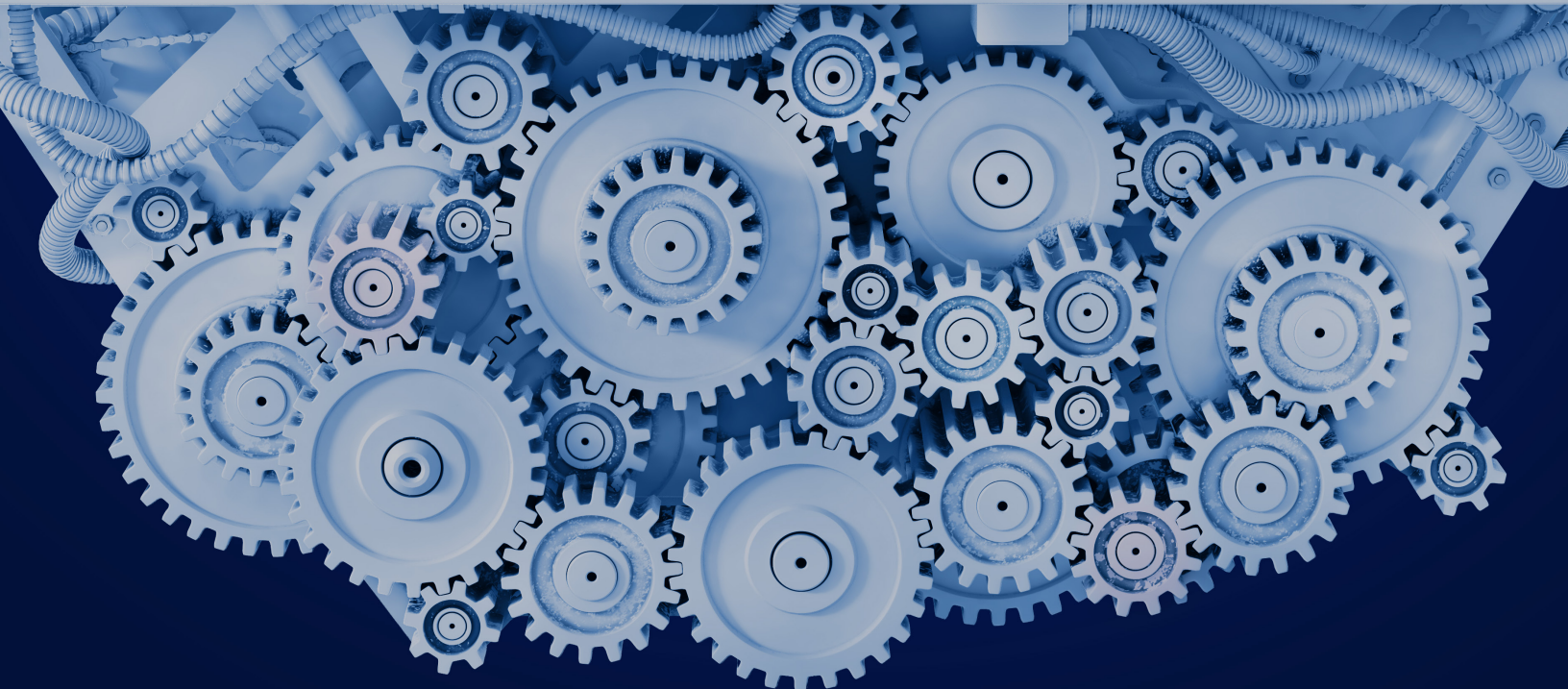
That mindset shows up in how infrastructure is built. Systems are implemented at a basic level. Investments are limited to what is

required to keep activity moving. Flexibility and scalability are acknowledged but pushed further down the priority list.

In the short term, this can feel disciplined and controlled. Over time, it limits understanding of performance and makes it harder to adjust if timelines shift or expectations change.

**This approach works until conditions change and the organization needs more than it has built for.**

**Each scenario leads to the same outcome: how much coordination, flexibility, and line of sight the organization has once execution begins**



# When the Business Needs Answers and There Aren't Any

The first real sign appears when someone asks a simple question; ***what is actually happening in the market?***

There are twenty-three spreadsheets being used to track performance. Each was built at a different time, by different people, for different purposes. One person is responsible for maintaining them, manually updating data, reconciling differences, and trying to keep everything aligned.

Doctor Smith appears in multiple files, but not in the same way. Activity is tracked in one place, engagement in another, and targeting in a third. None of it fully matches.

**By the time the numbers are pulled together, it is already time to start again. There is no time left to analyze what is occurring, only enough to produce the report.**

**This is where the gaps become impossible to ignore, not in theory, but in the day-to-day work of running the business.**

## Gaps tend to concentrate in the same places:

### Data and MDM

Data warehousing and master data management are often treated as optional until they are needed. Teams operate across spreadsheets that were never designed to work together. Records do not align. Definitions are inconsistent. By the time reporting becomes critical, there is no reliable foundation to support it, and no straightforward way to correct it without rework.

### CRM

CRM is in place, but only partially. Licenses are purchased, but key modules remain unused. Workflows that should support engagement and performance tracking are incomplete. The system exists, but it does not support how the business needs to operate, which limits adoption and reduces its value.

### Field Support

Field support is handled by internal IT, a team designed for office-based environments. Issues in the field take longer to resolve, and resources are pulled into work that is not aligned with their role. What appears to be a

cost-saving decision introduces friction into day-to-day execution.

### Headcount and Operating Structure

Hiring happens late, often under time constraints, and roles are filled based on availability rather than fit for the operating model or organizational culture. Without time to establish process, culture, and shared ways of working, teams enter launch without the structure needed to operate effectively.

Each of these choices can be justified in isolation. Together, they shape how the organization functions once execution begins. What makes this difficult to catch early is that nothing appears broken. Each part works well enough on its own, which makes the overall gap harder to recognize until coordination becomes necessary.

**The impact shows up when visibility is limited, execution starts to drift, and the business needs answers it cannot produce.**

# AI Expectations Are Outpacing Commercial Readiness

## AI is setting a higher bar for commercial readiness.

Its effectiveness depends on a data environment that reflects the business consistently, systems that support how teams actually work, and alignment across functions on how information is defined and used.

**As Ernie Payne, SVP of Commercial Services, often notes, “tools amplify alignment. They don’t create it.”**

That shows up quickly in how AI performs. When data is consistent, systems are connected, and teams are aligned on how the business operates, AI can support decision-making and execution in a meaningful way. It becomes part of how teams plan, act, and adjust in real time.

Without that structure, its role stays narrower. Outputs require more interpretation, adoption slows, and teams rely more heavily on their own judgment to validate what they are seeing.

For commercial teams, this changes how operations need to be built.



**Data** needs to be consistent enough to support real decisions.



**Systems** need to reflect how the field actually engages.



**Teams** need to be aligned on how performance is defined, measured, and acted on across functions.

These efforts shape how the organization runs and determine how deeply AI can support execution.

**Organizations that get this right are able to incorporate AI into how they run the business.**

It supports how they understand performance, how they respond to what they are seeing, and how they adjust over time.



## The Difference Between Smart Trade-Offs and Costly Ones

Reducing scope or delaying investment is part of how most teams get to launch. The issue is what that decision forces you to deal with later.

At the time, most of these decisions feel reasonable. You are moving quickly, working with what you have, and trying to keep things progressing. The problem shows up when execution starts and the gaps begin to stack on each other.

That is when teams realize they do not have a clear view of what is going on, the systems do not support how the field actually works, and fixing it takes more time than they have.

## A Practical Lens for Evaluating Commercial Decisions

In working with commercial teams in this stage, the same set of questions consistently determines whether an approach holds up or creates issues later.

Before moving forward, leadership should be clear on what each of these choices will require later.

A few questions make that clear very quickly:



### Visibility

If we remove this, do we lose a clear view into how effectively we are engaging HCPs?



### Recovery Cost

If we delay this, what will it take to fix later in terms of time, resources, and disruption?



### Decision Driver

Are we doing this to manage budget, or because it actually makes the field easier to run?



### Data Confidence

Can we trust the data we are using to make decisions?



### Operational Flow

Do our processes support execution, or do they slow teams down?



### Scalability

Will this hold as the business grows, or will we have to replace it?

**These are not theoretical questions. They determine how well the business can actually operate once launch begins.**

# What Ultimately Determines Success at Launch

**Success at launch comes down to how deliberately the foundation is built before execution begins.**

The teams that navigate this well are clear on what is in place, what is not, and what each trade-off will require later. They prioritize a clear view into the market, ensure systems support how the field actually operates, and build a data environment they can trust when decisions need to be made quickly.

That is what teams are working toward, whether they define it that way or not. When the foundation is in place, teams can move quickly, act on what they are seeing, and adjust without hesitation.

They build with enough structure to operate confidently from day one, and enough alignment across teams to act on what they are learning as it happens.

**Launch does not create the conditions for success. It tests whether they are already in place.**



**“At some point, the business should be able to run, measure, and adjust without having to rebuild the foundation.”**

— Ernie Payne

## Where Conexus Helps:

Conexus supports life sciences teams in strengthening the commercial infrastructure that determines whether organizations can execute effectively at launch, by focusing on:

- **Clear operating models and decision ownership** that align commercial leadership, field teams, data, and technology functions
- **Data and system architecture** that creates a consistent, reliable view of performance across CRM, MDM, and reporting environments
- **Practical implementation of commercial platforms** to ensure systems are fully configured, adopted, and aligned with how teams actually operate
- **Operating structures and support models** that enable field execution, reduce friction, and maintain consistency as the organization scales

**Our goal is to help teams build a commercial foundation that holds up under real execution, not just initial launch conditions.**

# About **Conexus Solutions, Inc.**

We combine deep industry knowledge with specialized talent to support progress for pharma and life sciences companies. Our team brings practical experience in commercial operations and technology, helping organizations strengthen capabilities, navigate change, and deliver results efficiently. By aligning strategy with the right tools, we help clients reduce risk, respond to evolving market demands, and build long-term value.

Schedule a consultation at [cnxsi.com](https://cnxsi.com).



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