

The Anthropic partner ecosystem

Market Research · September 2026

The open-door ecosystem, and the only one in this study where the first partner-firm acquistions are happening in real time - including one by a vehicle built with the vendor itself.

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Executive Summary

Anthropic is the youngest ecosystem in this study and the only one in the open-door phase, where the program admits partners freely, the firm count grows fastest and no scarcity yet exists to arbitrage. It is also the ecosystem where the very first partner-firm transactions are visible: in August 2026 Ode — a services vehicle built with Anthropic and valued at roughly 1.5 billion dollars — acquired Casper Studios, a 41-person Select-tier agency, while AlixPartners bought Artium partly for its tiered relationships with both Anthropic and OpenAI. The scarce asset in this channel is not certification depth. It is accreditation itself, and who holds it first.

Open door

LIFECYCLE PHASE

The only ecosystem in this study at phase one: free entry, fastest count growth, no scarcity.

Aug 2026

FIRST PARTNER ACQUISITION

Ode with Anthropic acquired Casper Studios, a 41-person Select-tier agency. Terms undisclosed.

~$1.5bn

ODE'S VALUATION

A services vehicle built with the vendor — an acquirer archetype that did not previously exist.

78

ARTIUM HEADCOUNT

Bought by AlixPartners for tiered relationships with both Anthropic and OpenAI, August 2026.

Grows

FIRM-COUNT DIRECTION

Open-door and crowd ecosystems add firms; mature ones shed them at 3–6% a year.

Accreditation

THE SCARCE ASSET

Not bench depth — tier status and lab relationships, which cannot be bought at any price later.

$4bn+

THE RIVAL VEHICLE

OpenAI Deployment Company, over USD 4bn at a USD 14bn valuation. A new buyer class.

Time but act

SELL-TIMING READ

No scarcity clock, but early flag-planters risk locking up the category.

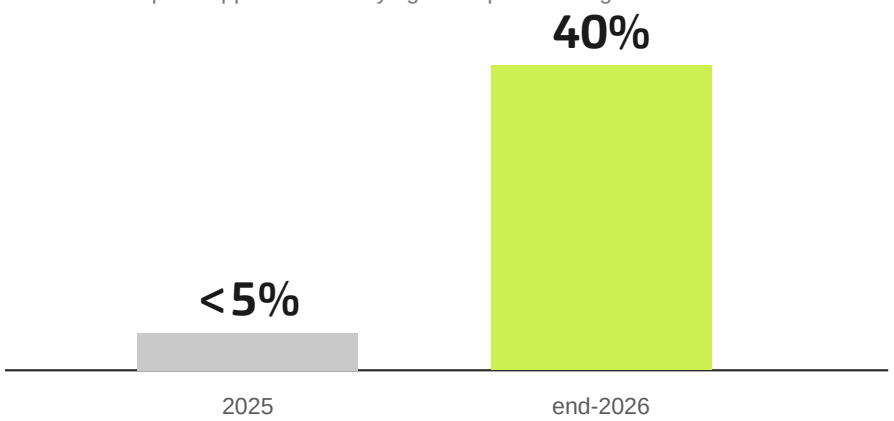
Sources: Aventis Advisors named-deals reference table (Ode with Anthropic / Casper Studios, 20 August 2026, 41-person Select-tier agency, undisclosed; AlixPartners / Artium, announced 4 August 2026, 78 employees, tiered relationships with OpenAI and Anthropic; Ode valued at roughly USD 1.5bn; OpenAI Deployment Company over USD 4bn at a USD 14bn valuation); lifecycle-phase assignment (open door) in Baker Tilly, *The Enterprise Software Partner Ecosystem* (Sept 2026).

Size, Growth, Trends & Drivers

Open-door ecosystems grow their partner count faster than any other phase, and this one is growing into the strongest demand signal in the sector: Gartner projects 40 percent of enterprise applications will carry task-specific AI agents by end-2026, up from under 5 percent in 2025. That is an eight-fold shift in a single year, and it lands on a partner population that barely existed two years ago. The constraint is not demand and not entry — it is that almost nobody has deployed enterprise agents at scale, which is precisely why the firms that have are being acquired rather than hired.

An eight-fold shift in one year

Share of enterprise applications carrying task-specific AI agents



GARTNER PROJECTION

These are very small firms by the standards of every other ecosystem in this study. The asset being bought is demonstrated deployment experience and lab standing — neither of which correlates with headcount at this stage of a market.

150

forward-deploy engineers at To the OpenAI veh founding deal

41

people at Casp Studios, bought Ode with Anthro

Four drivers a partner firm can price

- → **Agent deployment demand.** The strongest demand signal in the report: from under 5 percent to 40 percent of enterprise applications in a year, against a partner population with almost no track record.
- → **Forward-deployed engineering.** A named model in this channel — engineers embedded in the customer rather than a delivery factory. It is a talent business, and talent is what the transactions are buying.
- → **Agent governance and evaluation.** Enterprises deploying agents need supervision, audit and integration. The EU AI Act reaches full application in August 2026, turning governance into a billable obligation.
- → **Lab accreditation as an asset.** AlixPartners bought Artium partly for tiered relationships with two labs. Tier status is being priced before certification depth even exists.

Sources: Gartner agentic-AI projection (40% of enterprise applications carrying task-specific agents by end-2026, from under 5% in 2025); Aventis Advisors named-deals reference table (OpenAI Deployment Company / Tomoro, 150 forward-deployed engineers; Ode with Anthropic / Casper Studios, 41 people; AlixPartners / Artium, 78 employees, tiered relationships with OpenAI and Anthropic); EU AI Act application date; all as cited in Baker Tilly, *The Enterprise Software Partner Ecosystem* (Sept 2026).

End-Users

The buyer of Anthropic-based services in 2026 is an enterprise running its first production agent deployments, which makes this the highest-risk purchase in the report from the customer's side. Stated criteria are cost and functional fit; revealed criteria are risk reduction and credibility above everything — and with almost no reference base in the market, credibility comes from the lab relationship and from named deployments rather than from certifications or scale. That is why a 41-person agency was worth acquiring.

First movers

Large enterprise, AI programmes

Running initial production agent deployments with board visibility and no internal precedent. **Buys credibility and risk reduction above price.**

Highest

Regulated enterprise

BFSI, healthcare, insurance. Needs evaluation, audit trails and documented governance before an agent touches a customer process.

Embedded

Forward-deployed engagements

Customers buying senior engineers embedded in their own teams rather than a delivery project. **A consulting model, not an implementation one.**

Experimental

Digital natives & product teams

Building on the models directly with light services attached. High volume, low services revenue, and mostly self-serve.

Watching

Mid-market

Largely not yet buying. The partner economy here serves the enterprise vanguard, which caps near-term channel size.

Credibility is the product

Partner tier functions as a legitimacy signal in inverse proportion to buyer sophistication and in direct proportion to buyer risk. In a market with no established reference base, both risk and the value of the signal are at their maximum — which is why lab tier is priced as an asset in this channel and why the acquirers are buying standing rather than capacity.

Pricing logic is moving fastest here

Value-based firms grew 8.7 percent against 2.1 percent for time-based, and in AI work the argument against hourly billing is sharpest — the whole proposition is that the technology removes hours. Partner-firm retention benchmarks are not publicly disclosed with rigour; that gap is flagged, not filled.

Sources: end-user profiles and buying-criteria matrix in Baker Tilly, *The Enterprise Software Partner Ecosystem* (Sept 2026), including the finding that partner tier signals legitimacy inversely to buyer sophistication and directly to buyer risk; forward-deployed engineering model as described in the OpenAI Deployment Company / Tomoro transaction; Deloitte 2025 Professional Services Benchmark.

Complementary & Substitute Solutions

The complement question in this ecosystem is unusually sharp, because the platform absorbs capability faster than any other in the study. Model releases routinely subsume what partners were charging for months earlier. The complements that survive that are the ones the model cannot ship: governed enterprise data, evaluation and audit frameworks, integration into systems of record, and accountability for outcomes. The substitute that matters is the platform itself, followed by the enterprise learning to do this in-house.

Complements, ranked by durability

- → **Governance, evaluation and audit.** The most durable position: the EU AI Act reaches full application in August 2026, and a model release does not discharge a regulatory obligation.
- → **Governed enterprise data.** Agents are only as good as the data they act on. Data and analytics work carries a 16.3x EBITDA median, the highest in the study.
- → **Integration into systems of record.** MCP and enterprise integration work sits between the model and the ERP, CRM or ITSM estate — and that plumbing is the customer's problem, not the lab's.
- → **Managed agent estates.** Running and supervising deployed agents converts project revenue into annuity at roughly twice the multiple.

Substitutes, priced honestly

- → **The model itself.** The sharpest absorption risk in the report. Capability that ships in the next release is capability a partner stops billing for, and the release cadence here is measured in months.
- → **Lab-owned services vehicles.** Ode with Anthropic and the OpenAI Deployment Company are both services businesses backed by the labs, competing for the same enterprise work.
- → **In-house AI teams.** Enterprises staffing their own agent capability, which is the explicit end-state most of them describe.
- → **Agentic AI compressing its own delivery.** Uniquely circular: the technology being deployed is also the technology automating the deployment.

Sources: Aventis Advisors subsector multiples (data and analytics 16.3x EBITDA median); Salt Creek Advisory recurring-vs-project pricing framework; Ode with Anthropic and OpenAI Deployment Company formation data; Gartner agentic-AI projections; EU AI Act application date; all as cited in Baker Tilly, *The Enterprise Software Partner Ecosystem* (Sept 2026).

Value Chain

The chain in this ecosystem is short, unstable and inverted relative to the rest of the study. There is no resale layer at all, the advisory stage is where the money currently sits rather than a preamble to implementation, and the stages most exposed to absorption are the ones closest to the model. The durable positions are the ones furthest from it: governed data, integration into systems of record, and accountability for what the agent does.

STAGE	REVENUE MODEL	WHO CAPTURES IT	ABSORPTION RISK	MULTIPLE SIGNAL
Model access & API	Consumption	Anthropic keeps all	n/a	Out of scope — not a partner pool
Use-case discovery & advisory	Fixed, outcome	Applied-AI consultancy	High	**9.8x EBITDA** band, plus scarcity premium
Prompt & agent construction	T&M, embedded	Forward-deployed engineers	Highest	Absorbed by each model release
Enterprise integration & MCP	Project plus recurring	Integration specialist	Low	**10.7x–12.1x EBITDA**
Governed data foundation	Project plus recurring	Data & analytics firm	Low	**16.3x EBITDA** — the ceiling
Evaluation, governance & audit	Retainer	Governance specialist	Lowest	Regulatory obligation — **durable**
Managed agent estate	Recurring subscription	MSP	Low	**8.9x median, to 11.2x at scale**

The consolidator's instruction

Buy the stages the model cannot ship. Prompt and agent construction is the most absorbable work in this report — each release erodes it — while integration, governed data and audit obligations survive every model upgrade. A firm whose value is entirely in the top half of this table is buying a depreciating asset at a scarcity price.

Why the usual benchmarks are weak here

The median private IT-services transaction fell to 8.8x EBITDA in late 2025 from 13.6x in 2023 as buyers stress-tested billable-hours models. None of the three observed AI deals disclosed a price, so these bands are reference points rather than comparables.

Sources: Aventis Advisors value-chain stage multiples, subsector medians and the Q4 2025 median of 8.8x against a 2023 peak of 13.6x; AI-absorption analysis; EU AI Act application date; all as cited in Baker Tilly, *The Enterprise Software Partner Ecosystem* (Sept 2026). The stage breakdown for this ecosystem is a Baker Tilly adaptation of that chain; no Anthropic-specific stage multiples are disclosed.

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