

M&A BANKERS · THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

The Top 7 Things an M&A Investment Banker Can Get Out of Dakota Marketplace

Running a great process requires knowing the buyer universe cold before the teaser goes out. Here's how Dakota gives bankers that edge.

117K+

PORTFOLIO COMPANIES

20K+

GPS TRACKED

50K+

FUNDS COVERED



Gui Costin

Founder & CEO, Dakota

The pitch is the easy part. Any competent investment banker can build a compelling narrative around a business, dress up an EBITDA bridge, and produce a book that makes a mediocre company look like a market leader. The hard part — the part that separates the bankers who consistently close at the top of the range from those who don't — is process design. And process design starts with one thing: knowing the buyer universe better than anyone else in the room.

Who are the most credible buyers for this asset? Which PE sponsors are actively deploying capital in this sector right now — not six months ago, not in their last fund cycle, but right now? Which strategics have been acquiring in adjacent spaces and would pay a premium for this particular capability? Which financial sponsors have portfolio companies that create a genuine buy-and-build angle — the kind that justifies a price the seller never thought they'd see?

These are the questions that determine whether a process clears at eight times EBITDA or eleven. Dakota Marketplace is the platform built to answer them. Here are the seven ways it makes M&A; bankers materially better at their jobs.

THE SEVEN USE CASES

01 Buyer Universe Construction

BUILDING THE MOST COMPLETE FINANCIAL SPONSOR BUYER LIST BEFORE THE PROCESS LAUNCHES

The quality of a sell-side process is almost entirely determined by the quality of the buyer list. A process with thirty credible financial sponsors who genuinely fit the asset will almost always produce a better outcome than one with sixty names, half of whom are there to maintain coverage relationships rather than to bid.

The problem is that building a truly comprehensive and current buyer list is harder than it looks. Sponsor coverage lists go stale. Associates rotate. Mandates shift. The fund that was active in healthcare IT two years ago may have pivoted entirely — or may have raised a new, larger fund specifically to double down on the sector. Without current data, you're working from memory and relationship anecdotes.

Dakota's database of 20,000+ GPs and 50,000+ funds — including current investment mandate, fund size, vintage, and recent deal activity — gives bankers a systematic foundation for buyer list construction that doesn't depend on who happens to be in the MD's contact list. You can screen by sector focus, deal size sweet spot, recent transaction velocity, and geographic preference, and build a list that is genuinely comprehensive rather than just long.

» [20K+ GPs](#) · [50K+ FUNDS](#) · [MANDATE & ACTIVITY DATA](#)



The difference between a good process and a great one is built in the first two weeks — before a single call is made.

02 Sponsor Coverage Intelligence

KNOWING WHICH SPONSORS HAVE DRY POWDER — AND ARE UNDER PRESSURE TO DEPLOY IT

Not all financial sponsors on a buyer list are equally motivated to close. A fund that raised two years ago and has deployed 80% of its capital has both the dry powder and the mandate urgency to move aggressively on the right deal. A fund that just held a first close on its newest vehicle and is still building relationships with its LPs is a different conversation entirely.

This distinction matters enormously in process management. The bankers who understand the fundraising and deployment cycle of the sponsors they're calling can prioritize outreach, calibrate how hard to push for management meetings, and read the signals from an IOI far more accurately than those who treat every sponsor as an equivalent participant.

Dakota's fund-level data — vintage, fund size, deployment status, LP relationships — gives bankers the context to make those distinctions with data rather than guesswork. Combined with fund performance data, it also helps bankers identify which sponsors most need a strong deal for their current fund narrative, and which are bidding opportunistically without real conviction.

» [FUND VINTAGE](#) · [DEPLOYMENT DATA](#) · [LP RELATIONSHIPS](#)

03 Strategic Rationale Intelligence

IDENTIFYING SPONSORS WITH PORTFOLIO COMPANIES THAT CREATE A GENUINE BUY-AND-BUILD ANGLE

The highest prices in PE sell-side processes are almost never paid by financial buyers acting purely on standalone value. They're paid by financial buyers who have a platform company in their portfolio that the acquisition makes dramatically more valuable — a bolt-on that accelerates geographic expansion, fills a product gap, or adds a customer base the platform has been trying to reach for two years.

Finding those buyers requires knowing what 117,000+ PE-backed portfolio companies look like, and which of them create a genuine strategic rationale for your client's business. That's not information you can find on a firm's website or in a press release. It requires a systematic map of who owns what across the private markets ecosystem.

Dakota's portfolio company database gives bankers exactly that map. Before a process launches, a banker can identify every sponsor-owned platform company where the client represents a credible add-on — and those sponsors move to the top of the outreach priority list, because they have a reason to pay more than standalone DCF value would suggest.

The financial sponsor who pays eleven times EBITDA for your client's company is almost always the one for whom the acquisition is worth twelve times. Finding them before the process starts is the banker's highest-value contribution to the outcome.

» [117K+ PORTFOLIO COMPANIES](#) · [SPONSOR OWNERSHIP GRAPH](#)

04 Pitch Preparation

[WALKING INTO SPONSOR MEETINGS WITH INTELLIGENCE, NOT JUST A BOOK](#)

Every financial sponsor pitch meeting has the same basic structure: the banker presents the asset, the sponsor asks questions, and somewhere in that conversation the banker tries to demonstrate that they understand the sponsor's portfolio and strategy well enough to be a credible partner on the transaction. The bankers who do this convincingly win mandates. The ones who clearly haven't done the homework lose them.

Dakota gives bankers the ability to walk into every sponsor meeting genuinely prepared — not just with the standard overview of the firm's recent deals, but with a specific understanding of which portfolio companies are relevant, how the current fund is performing and positioned relative to peers, what sectors the fund's mandate is focused on in the current vintage, and where this deal fits in the context of their current deployment cycle.

That level of preparation changes the quality of the conversation. Instead of a banker presenting to a sponsor, you have two parties talking about a deal that is genuinely relevant to both sides — which is what mandate wins are built on.

[» FUND PERFORMANCE · PORTFOLIO DATA · MANDATE INTELLIGENCE](#)

05 Comparable Transaction Analysis

[BUILDING DEAL COMPS FROM ACTUAL SPONSOR TRANSACTION DATA — NOT JUST PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS](#)

Valuation in a PE sell-side process is anchored by precedent transactions. The client wants to know what comparable businesses have sold for. The buyer wants to understand what the market has cleared at. The banker's job is to build a comp set that is genuinely relevant — same sector, similar scale, comparable business model — and use it to establish a credible value range before the process opens.

The challenge is that private market transaction data is fragmented, incomplete, and often significantly lagged by the time it reaches public databases. Dakota's portfolio company data — including sponsor ownership, acquisition history, and hold period intelligence — gives bankers a richer and more current foundation for comparable transaction analysis than relying solely on publicly announced deals and disclosed multiples.

You can identify which sponsors have transacted in your client's specific sub-sector, at what approximate scale, and at what point in the market cycle — building a comp set that reflects actual private market activity rather than the subset that happened to generate a press release.

[» TRANSACTION HISTORY · SECTOR OWNERSHIP · HOLD PERIOD DATA](#)

06 Coverage Prioritization

SYSTEMATICALLY FOCUSING COVERAGE EFFORT ON THE SPONSORS MOST LIKELY TO GENERATE MANDATES

Coverage is the lifeblood of M&A; banking, and it is also one of the most poorly allocated activities in the business. MDs and directors spread coverage across dozens of sponsor relationships simultaneously, with relatively little systematic data on which relationships are most likely to produce a mandate in the near term — and which are relationship maintenance at best.

Dakota changes how that allocation decision gets made. By tracking fund-level activity — recent transactions, current deployment pace, fund vintage, sector focus shifts — bankers can identify which sponsors are in the most active phase of their deal cycle and prioritize coverage accordingly. A sponsor who has made four acquisitions in the last eighteen months and is deploying from a fund raised two years ago is a different coverage priority than one who closed a new fund three months ago and is still finalizing the strategy.

LP relationship data adds another layer: understanding which LPs are backing which sponsors — and how those relationships are evolving — gives bankers insight into the institutional context behind sponsor decision-making that rarely surfaces in a standard coverage call.

» [FUND ACTIVITY](#) · [DEPLOYMENT PACE](#) · [LP RELATIONSHIP DATA](#)

“““

Coverage without data is just calendar management. Coverage with data is a competitive advantage.

07 New Business Development

IDENTIFYING SPONSOR-BACKED COMPANIES APPROACHING A NATURAL EXIT WINDOW

The best M&A mandates don't come from responding to RFPs. They come from showing up in front of the right sponsor — with a credible, well-prepared pitch — six to twelve months before they've decided they're ready to run a process. By the time a sponsor has issued an RFP, the relationship-building window has closed and the banker is competing on execution reputation rather than differentiation.

Dakota's hold period data across 117,000+ sponsor-backed companies is a systematic source of business development intelligence. A PE-backed company that's been in a portfolio for five or six years is statistically approaching the window where a sale process becomes the natural next step. Identifying those companies — by sector, geography, sponsor, and approximate scale — and building a targeted outreach strategy around them is one of the most direct applications of Dakota's data for M&A; banker business development.

Instead of waiting for the phone to ring, bankers using Dakota can build a forward-looking pipeline of sell-side opportunities and position themselves in front of sponsors before the decision to run a process is made. That's where mandates are really won.

» [117K+ PORTFOLIO COMPANIES](#) · [HOLD PERIOD DATA](#) · [SPONSOR ACTIVITY](#)

AI-POWERED

One More Thing: All of This, Now Powered by AI

Dakota has always been a data platform. Now it's also a conversational analyst. The new AI-powered intelligence layer lets M&A bankers ask questions in plain language and get decision-ready answers — drawn from Dakota's proprietary database, not the public web. No filter stacking. No field navigation. Just answers.

Instead of building queries, you ask:

"Which PE-backed business services companies in the Midwest have been held more than five years and are in the \$20M–\$75M EBITDA range — potential sell-side mandates worth calling on?"

"Which financial sponsors have been most active acquiring healthcare IT companies in the last 18 months, and what platform companies in their portfolio could serve as a buy-and-build acquirer for my client?"

"Which funds in the industrial sector raised two to three years ago, are likely 60–70% deployed, and should be actively looking to transact in the next 12 months?"

28 years of proprietary private markets intelligence. Now accessible in a single question.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The mechanics of M&A banking haven't changed much in thirty years. You source the mandate, build the book, run the process, negotiate the deal, close the transaction. What has changed — and will continue to change — is how much information is available to the bankers who choose to use it, and how much of a disadvantage it creates for the ones who don't.

Dakota Marketplace gives M&A bankers a structural intelligence advantage at every stage: better buyer lists before the process starts, sharper sponsor meetings during coverage, more compelling pitches for the mandate, and a proactive business development pipeline that doesn't depend on waiting for the phone to ring.

The bankers who consistently close at the top of the range, win the mandates their competitors are pitching for, and build the sponsor relationships that generate repeat business aren't doing something categorically different from everyone else. They just know more — and they know it faster. Dakota is how that advantage

gets built systematically, rather than through thirty years of accumulated network.

**See how Dakota Marketplace works for your M&A;
practice.**

Request an Investment Banking–Specific Demo

» [REQUEST A DEMO](#)