

# FUTURE ROLES REPORT



THE FORWARD  
DEPLOYED SITUATION

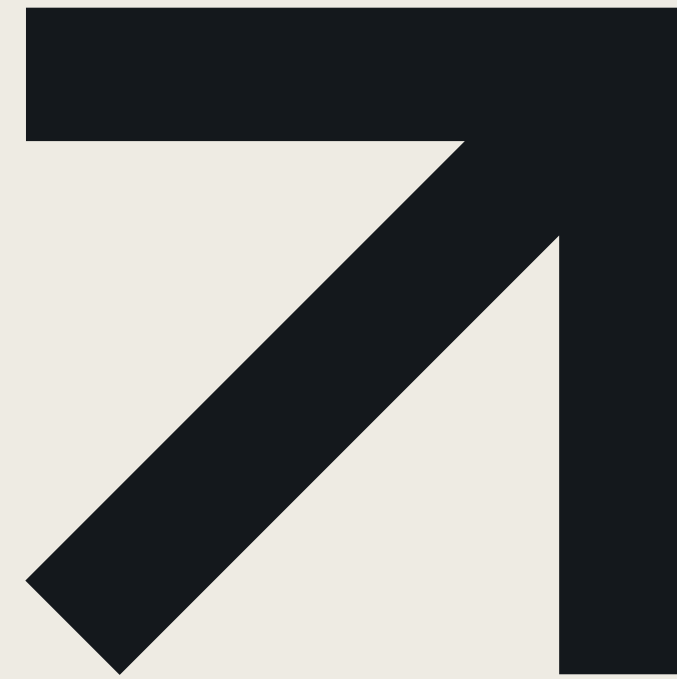
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# OVERVIEW

**The Forward Deployed Engineer (FDE) is the fastest-growing, most misunderstood role in tech right now.**

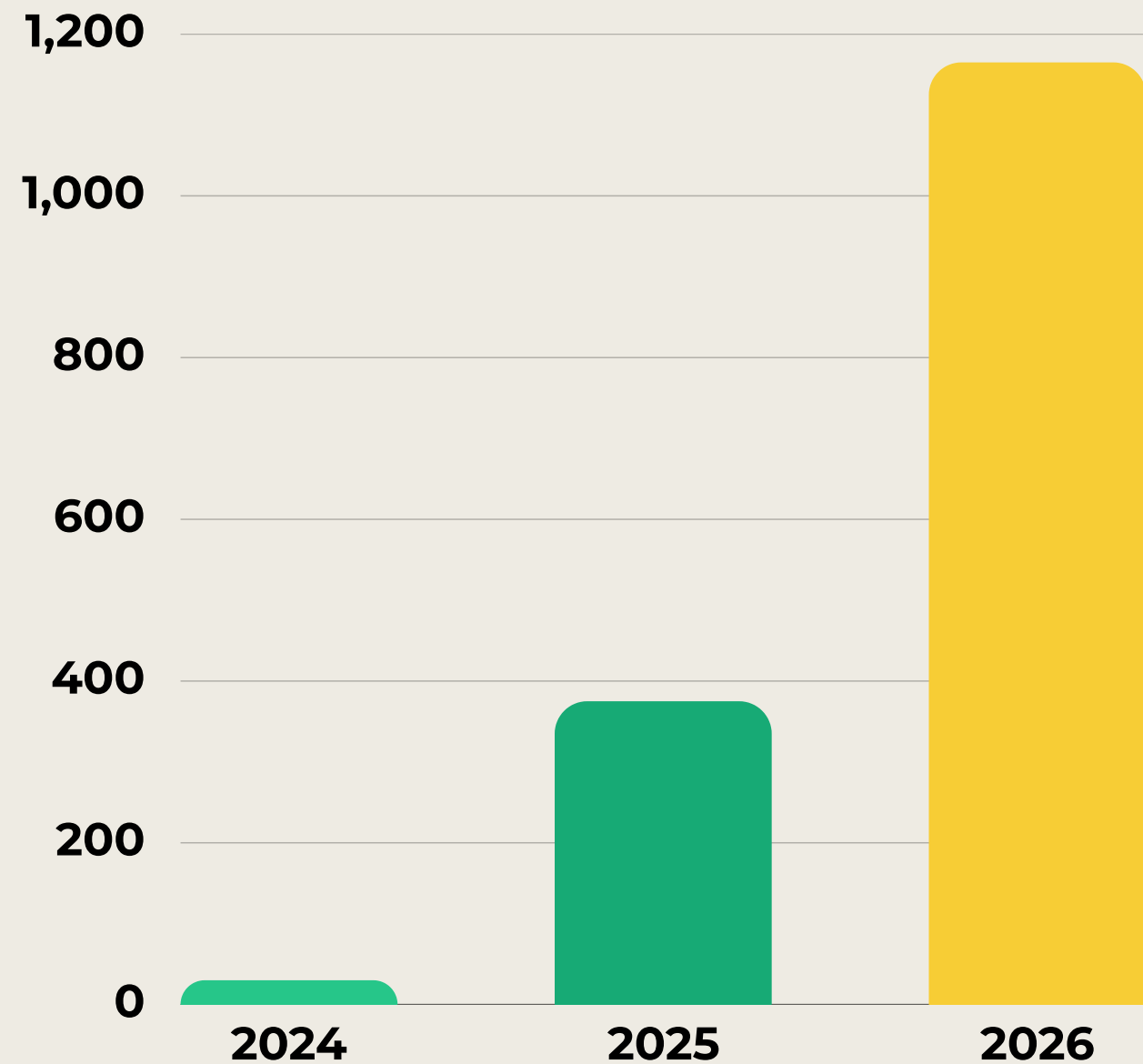
Originating from AI-native giants, the role has rapidly mutated to serve everyone from enterprise vendors to low-tech SMEs.

But who are they, and do you actually need one?



- 1 WHY HAS THIS ROLE BECOME SO POPULAR?**
- 2 IS IT GOING TO STICK AROUND?**
- 3 ARE YOUR COMPETITORS HIRING FDE'S?**
- 4 DO YOU NEED ONE?**
- 5 WHERE TO FIND THEM AND HOW TO LURE THEM.**

# FDE GROWTH



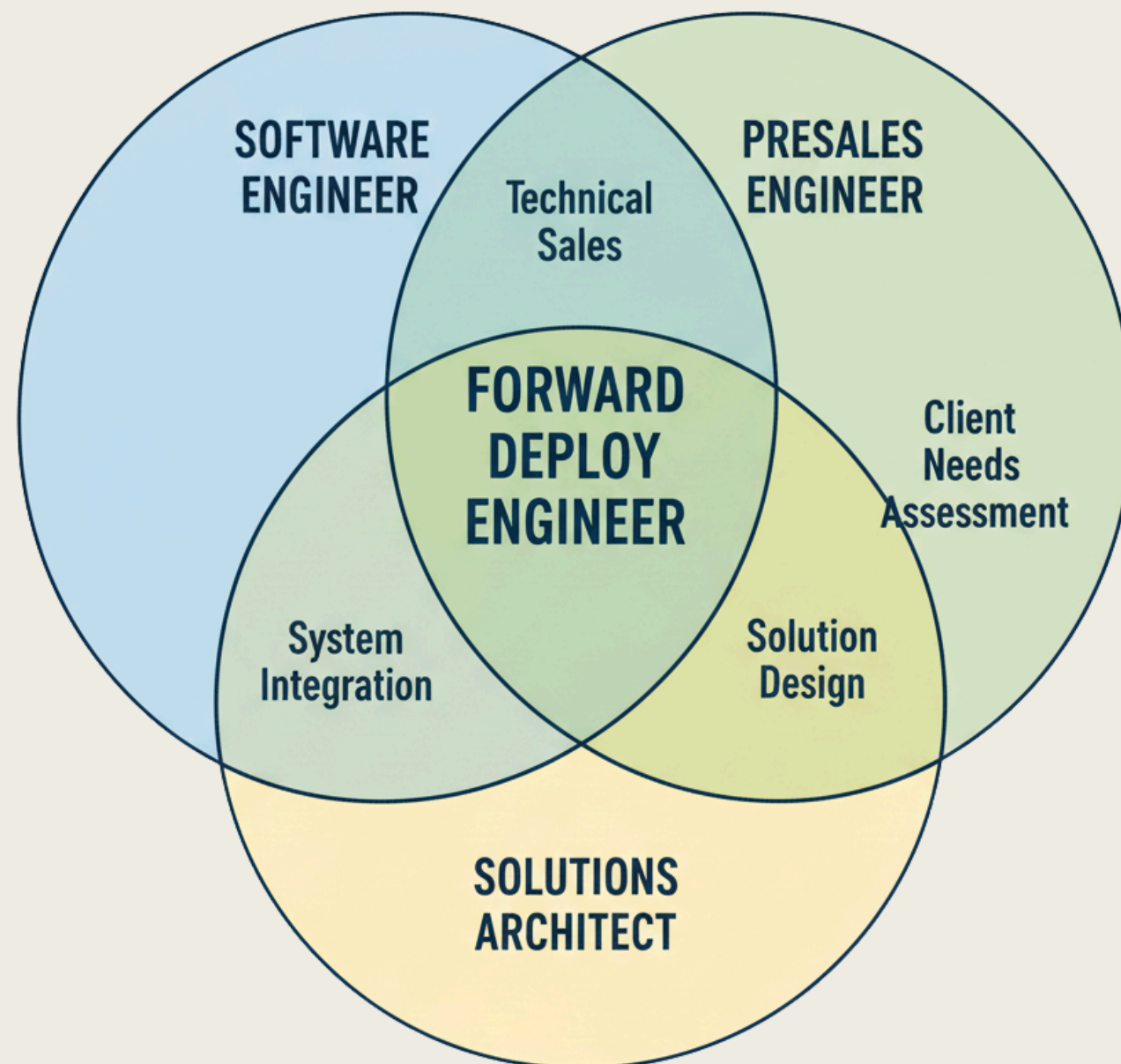
MONTHLY AVERAGE GLOBAL FDE JOB ADS

“**OPENAI PLANS TO NEARLY DOUBLE ITS WORKFORCE IN 2026 FROM 4,500 TO 8,000 EMPLOYEES, AND FDE’S WILL MAKE UP A LARGE PORTION OF THAT NUMBER.**”

- GERGELY OROSZ.

MARKET METRIC	GROWTH INDICATOR
<b>Global Demand</b>	FDE job postings grew >10x in 2025 compared to the prior year.
<b>Corporate Mindshare</b>	Public company earnings transcripts mentioning the role jumped from 8 to 50 in a single year.
<b>Australian Market</b>	Job listings for FDEs in Australia rose 800% between Jan–Sept 2025.

# ANATOMY OF THE FDE



**FDES SIT AT THE INTERSECTION OF PRODUCT AND CUSTOMER, AND TOUCH EVERYTHING FROM IMPLEMENTATION, CUSTOMER OUTCOMES, AND PRODUCT FEEDBACK LOOPS.**

## DEEPLY TECHNICAL

They are the crucial bridge between a complex AI product and a customer's messy reality. Enterprise AI is not "plug-and-play." FDEs own the engineering delivery from discovery to implementation, dramatically accelerating a client's time-to-value.

## CLIENT FACING

They've shipped product AND owned customer outcomes. Nearly 90% of hiring managers want a track record of customer-facing work, not an engineer who's "open to" client work someday.

## FLUENT IN AI

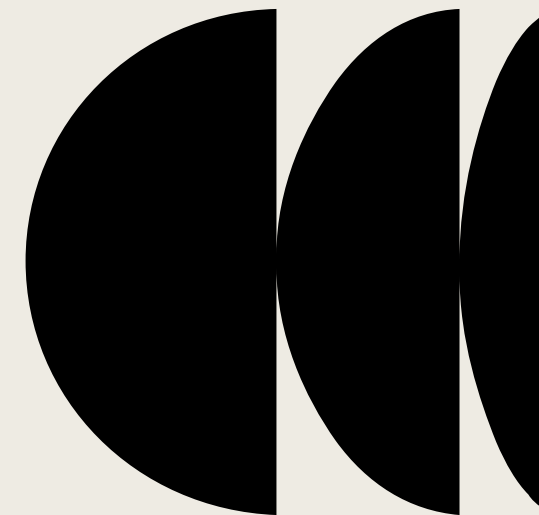
They now need strong knowledge in RAG, agent design and LLM engineering - traits that were non-existent in FDE roles a few years ago.

# THE MARKET DIVIDE

# MARKET FRUSTRATIONS

COMPANIES CURRENTLY WANT AN FDE, BUT CANNOT ARTICULATE WHY.  
- THIS MISALIGNMENT IS SOURING THE MARKET.

	The Vendor FDE	The Internal FDE
<b>Employer</b>	AI-native startups & Enterprise Software (e.g., <i>Snowflake</i> ).	Traditional, non-tech SMEs (e.g., Real Estate agencies, logistics).
<b>Mission</b>	<b>Outside-In:</b> Deploying their company's proprietary product deeper in to their client.	<b>Inside-Out:</b> Making sense of AI chaos, building agents in gaps and stitching together 3rd-party LLMs and legacy CRMs.
<b>Outcome</b>	Ultimate customer success weapon; prevents churn by making the software structurally vital.	Modernizes internal workflows; highly popular as a <b>fractional / 3-6 month contract</b> hire.



## CANDIDATE BAIT-AND-SWITCH

Engineers were hired to write production code, but quickly realise the day-to-day is pure enterprise sales.

## CLIENT MISDIAGNOSIS

Companies blindly hire for an "FDE" when they actually just need a hands-on Solution Architect or a Presales Engineer with specific domain knowledge.

## CONSULTANCY DEPENDENCY

Unsure of how to hire a fractional FDE, companies fall back on the Big 4 consultancies - effectively paying for three people to do the work of one.

# DO YOU NEED AN FDE?

## YES, IF

YOUR CLIENTS ARE BUYING YOUR SOLUTION BUT FAILING TO ACHIEVE ROI BECAUSE THEY DON'T KNOW HOW TO DEPLOY IT INTERNALLY.

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YOUR SALES CYCLE STALLS DURING TECHNICAL DUE DILIGENCE OR PROOF OF CONCEPT PHASES.

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YOU NEED AN ACCELERATED FEEDBACK LOOP BETWEEN YOUR MOST DEMANDING CLIENTS AND YOUR CORE ENGINEERING TEAM.

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YOUR PRODUCT REQUIRES CUSTOM INTEGRATION INTO LEGACY OR COMPLEX SYSTEMS.

## NO, IF

YOUR PRODUCT IS A TRUE "PLUG-AND-PLAY" PRODUCT-LED GROWTH WITH ZERO INTEGRATION FRICTION.

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YOUR PRODUCT DOESN'T ALLOW FOR CROSS / UP-SELL OPPORTUNITIES.

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YOU JUST NEED A BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER WHO NEEDS TO SELL YOUR PRODUCT, NOT CONSULT ON TECHNICAL CUSTOMISATIONS.

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YOUR CLIENTS HAVE SOPHISTICATED INTERNAL ENGINEERING TEAMS WHO PREFER TO BUILD THEIR OWN INTEGRATIONS VIA YOUR PUBLIC API.



# HOW MUCH DO THEY COST?



FDE PERSONA	TARGET ROLE	BASE SALARY (PERMANENT)	DAILY CONTRACT RATE	KEY MARKET DRIVER
The Vendor FDE	<b>AI Forward Deployed Engineer</b>	\$180,000 - \$280,000+	Extremely Rare	Vendors tightly guard proprietary knowledge, making contractors rare.
The Vendor FDE	<b>Technical Presales Engineer</b>	\$160,000 - \$220,000	Rare	Salaries peak at \$280k in Gov/Canberra, but generally sit lower than FDEs due to zero production coding.
<b>The Internal FDE</b>	<b>Systems / Solutions Architect</b>	\$165,000 - \$195,000	\$1,150 - \$1,400	Fractional market is booming. SMEs pay premium daily rates for 3-6 month AI integration sprints.
<b>The Internal FDE</b>	<b>Enterprise AI Architect</b>	\$195,000 - \$220,000	\$1,300 - \$1,500+	Demanded by ASX 100 for massive digital transformations. Requires deep cloud experience.

# HOW TO HIRE AN FDE

Whenever a candidate sees a " / " in a job title ("Software / Presales Engineer"), they keep scrolling.

You must be infallible with what you need this person to do.



## 1 DEFINE THE GRAVITY

Decide exactly where this role anchors. Will they spend 70% of their time writing integration code and 30% in client workshops? Or vice versa? Explicitly document requirement splits.

## 2 OVERHAUL THE INTERVIEW

Abandon LeetCode tests. FDEs fail due to poor communication, not sorting algorithms. Use a "Client Roleplay + System Design" hybrid interview to test architecture and stakeholder management.

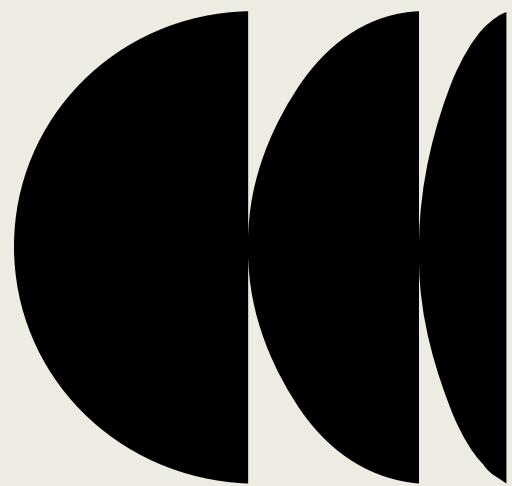
## 3 PITCH THE AUTONOMY

Top-tier FDEs are entrepreneurial. Emphasize that they will "own the technical outcome" for major accounts, rather than just pulling Jira tickets from a backlog.

## 4 TARGET THE 'FRUSTRATED'

Look for Senior Engineers bored of internal development, or PreSales Engineers frustrated they aren't allowed to touch production code. These are your prime transition candidates.

# THE ROI OF AN FDE



**TRADITIONAL SOFTWARE ENGINEERS ARE MEASURED BY THE FEATURES THEY SHIP. YOU MEASURE AN FDE BY THE REVENUE THEY PROTECT, THE FRICTION THEY REMOVE, AND THE OPERATIONAL ROADBLOCKS THEY OBLITERATE.**

## RESOURCE OPTIMISATION

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Deploying a **Fractional FDE** (e.g., 4 days/week or a 3-month sprint) to lead an AI-transformation or internal integration.

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**Zero Headcount Bloat** - Enterprise-grade technical consulting without committing to a permanent \$200k+ base salary.

## TIME-TO-VALUE

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An FDE parachutes into a **stalled enterprise deployment**, bypassing the client's internal IT bottlenecks.

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**Faster Revenue Recognition** - Months of stalled deployment are reduced to weeks.

## NET REVENUE RETENTION

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Ensuring your software is **deeply embedded** into the client's messy, legacy workflows.

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**Churn Reduction** - Clients won't churn when your product is structurally vital to their operations.

## SALES CYCLE VELOCITY

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Acting as a **technical peer** to the client's CTO during due diligence to secure the "Technical Win."

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**Higher Close Rates** - Complex enterprise deals stop dying in the Proof of Concept phase.

## CORE R&D EFFICIENCY

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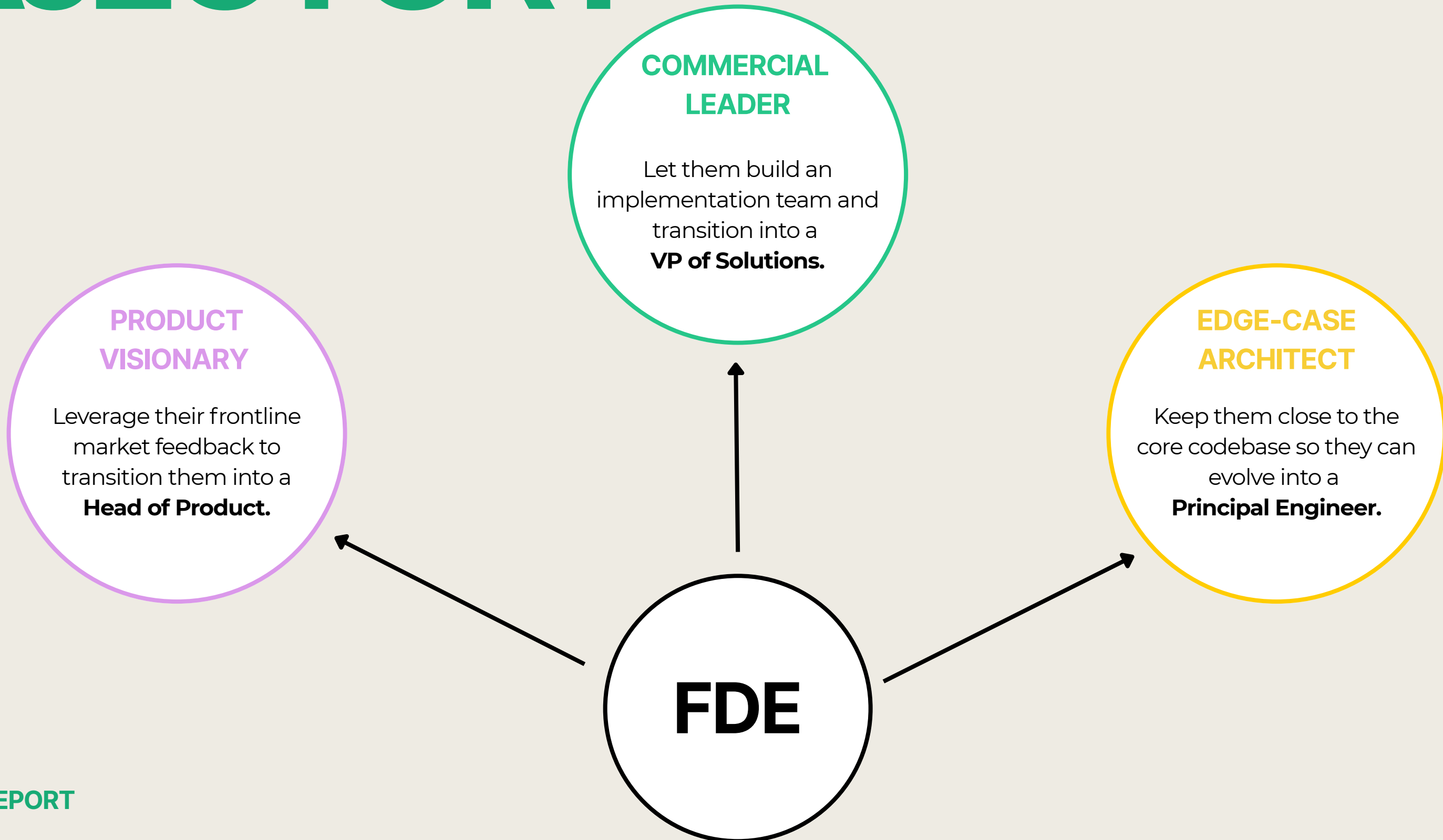
Providing a high-fidelity, real-world **feedback loop** straight from the front lines.

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**Zero Wasted Cycles** - Your core team builds exactly what the market needs, not what they guess it needs.

# CAREER TRAJECTORY

ENGINEERS ARE EXTREME FLIGHT RISKS IF PIGEONHOLED INTO SALES. TO RETAIN THEM, YOU MUST PROVIDE A TRAJECTORY THAT HONORS THEIR DUAL SKILL SET.



# WHO WE ARE

AUSTRALIA'S LEADING RECRUITMENT CONSULTANCY

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10,000 PLACEMENTS  
1,000 TECH COMPANIES  
35 YEARS OF FAMILY LED BUSINESS

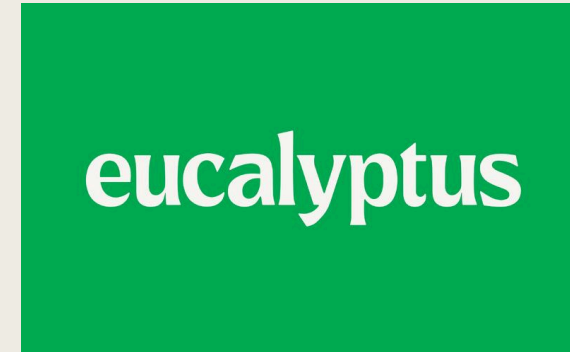
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3,000 CANDIDATE CONVERSATIONS PER WEEK  
EXCLUSIVE AI PLATFORM INTEGRATION  
15 WONDERFULLY HUMAN HUMANS

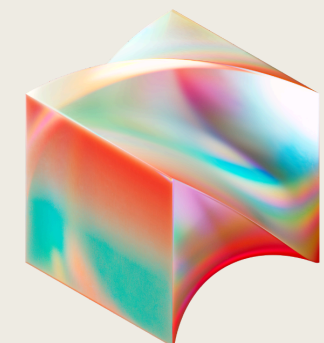
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ATLASSIAN



BLOCK