

Chapter 6: Strategic Control Points – Turning Unique Assets into Market Power

A board-level guide to understanding where advantage becomes influence

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A conductor controls the energy and timing of the individual musicians and the emotions of the audience. She is the ultimate control point in a concert hall.

From Assets to Control

Once distinctive assets are defined and embedded, a new strategic horizon opens: the point where capability turns into control. Unique assets are the foundation of advantage — but power emerges when those assets begin to shape the market itself. A technology, dataset, or customer relationship may be distinctive inside the firm, yet its true potential appears only when others depend on it to function. This is the bridge from capability to control: from what you own, to what defines how the game is played.

Some companies outperform competitors. A few redefine the field itself. They do this not by working harder, but by shaping where and how value flows. Strategic control points are the quiet levers that determine who controls access, standards, and scale in a market. For mid-sized companies, discovering and strengthening these points is not just a way to compete better – it is how you make competition work for you.

Seeing Control Where Others See Performance

Most firms focus on performance: growing sales, improving efficiency, serving customers faster. These are essential, but they rarely change the balance of power. The companies that truly lead their markets understand something deeper: advantage depends on **control**.

Control is not dominance by size. It is influence by position. You hold a control point when others depend on you to reach customers, comply with standards, or operate effectively. Think of Apple's App Store — a platform that controls both sides of its market. Developers depend on it to reach users; users depend on it for the apps and services that shape their daily lives. Over time, this mutual dependency becomes self-reinforcing. Apple doesn't own every app or customer — it owns the connection between them. The same logic applies when a mid-sized company builds a platform, data layer, or compliance framework that both customers and partners quietly depend on.

For mid-sized companies, control points often hide in plain sight: proprietary data, embedded integrations, technical standards, or regulatory expertise. Recognizing them is a discipline of perspective – seeing where dependency already exists, and where it could be deepened.

From Strength to System

A unique asset becomes a strategic control point when it extends beyond your own boundary. What begins as a strength becomes power when others cannot operate efficiently without it.

A Belgian fintech discovered this when it built an invoicing API that banks, accountants, and ERP vendors all began to rely on. At first, it was a product feature. Within two years, it had become an ecosystem standard. Every new integration reinforced the company's centrality. Its product was good; its position became unassailable.

Control points are not built by decree. They evolve from deliberate consistency: investing in integration rather than isolation, transparency rather than opacity, and trust rather than opportunism. Influence is granted, not seized.

In this way, control points reflect an organisation's maturity. They emerge when a company's assets stop serving only its own efficiency and start shaping the efficiency of others. They turn private capability into shared infrastructure — and in that transition lies defensibility.

How Control Points Create Defensibility

Control points protect value because they alter the **terms of competition**. They shift rivalry from features and price to access and participation. Once established, they anchor switching costs and create compounding advantage. The more others rely on your position, the harder it becomes to dislodge you.

Unlike scale or brand, control points are not easily visible in financial statements. They appear in patterns of dependency: who needs your data, whose systems embed your interfaces, which regulations reference your compliance framework. The art is to map these dependencies and nurture them without suffocating them. Excessive control breeds resistance. Subtle control breeds loyalty.

Some of the most resilient mid-market firms understand this instinctively. A Dutch energy software provider, for example, built a forecasting algorithm that grid operators and renewable producers both came to rely on. Rather than monetising access aggressively, it priced predictably and published interfaces transparently. Within five years, it became the de facto scheduling standard in its segment. Influence, once earned, turned into quiet dominance.

The Mid-Market Opportunity

Large corporations often inherit control points from historical dominance. Mid-sized companies must **create** them through focus and insight. That is not a disadvantage – it is freedom. Free from legacy systems, they can position early in emerging ecosystems, define interoperability standards, or become trusted intermediaries in fragmented markets.

In fragmented B2B sectors, a company that integrates competitors' data or simplifies compliance can quietly become indispensable. Over time, the market aligns around its architecture. The goal is not ownership, but **orchestration** — shaping the rhythm and flow of an ecosystem without necessarily holding its assets.

Orchestration is the higher form of strategy. It turns competition into choreography. Mid-sized companies, precisely because of their scale and adaptability, are often the best positioned to do this.

Leadership Implications

Strategic control begins as a choice: to see your business not only as a performer, but as a designer of market structure. That shift requires three disciplines:

- **Curiosity about dependency:** Where do others already rely on you more than you realize?
- **Courage to standardize:** Can you turn internal efficiency into shared architecture that others adopt?
- **Patience to consolidate:** Control points compound slowly. Their power lies in persistence.

The test of leadership is not to seek control, but to deserve it. True control emerges when partners and customers find advantage in your stability. Great strategists do not chase advantage; they design it into the system. Mid-sized firms can do the same – not by mimicking giants, but by understanding where in their network influence quietly accumulates.

The Quiet Strength of Control

Control points are not about control for its own sake. They are about stability in a shifting market. The company that defines the rules of interaction does not need to dominate every transaction; it simply ensures that every transaction passes through its gate.

True strategic control is quiet. It is the moment when competitors cannot grow without you – and customers do not want to.

“You win the game not by running faster, but by deciding where the track begins.”

The next chapter explores how to translate such control into rhythm — the discipline of strategic execution.

About Outdoor Connect

Outdoor Connect is an independent strategy advisory platform focused on board-level value creation for mid-sized, growth-driven companies (€50–€1B). We bring direct senior engagement—without the traditional consulting pyramid—to help founders, CEOs and boards set direction, make sharper capital allocation choices, and embed an execution rhythm. Core areas include growth strategy in technology and the energy transition, strategic repositioning in fragmented markets, and board-level sparring on value creation and M&A preparation.

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