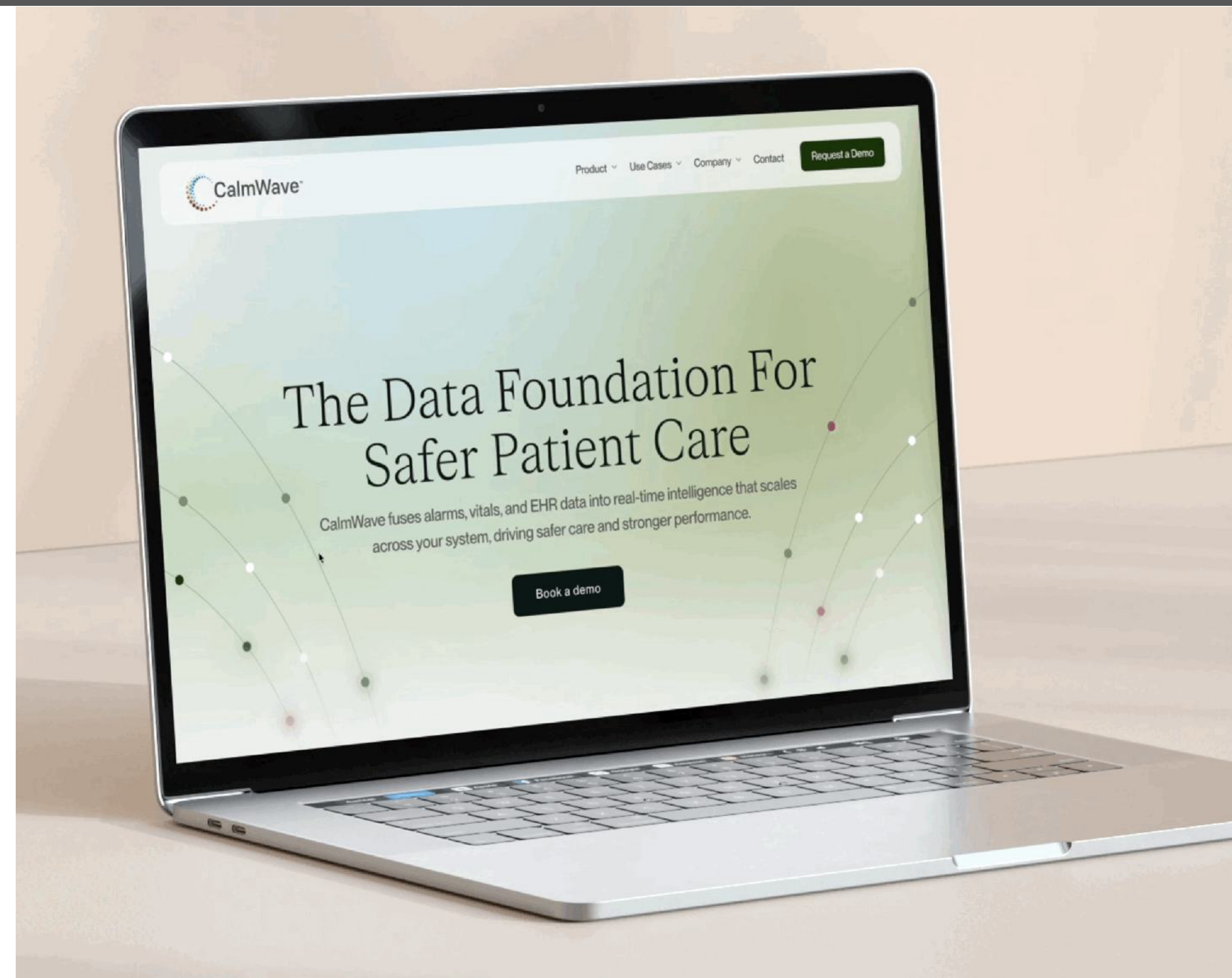


# Building a Category from Nothing

- CalmWave
- VP of Marketing
- 2022–Present



## The Situation

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When I joined CalmWave, the company had a product with no category. They were solving alarm fatigue in ICUs, a decades-old clinical problem, but what they'd actually built was significantly bigger: a platform that made systemic operational fragmentation visible and actionable across clinical, IT, and administrative teams in hospital systems.

The messaging didn't know this yet. The product was positioned as "alarm reduction software." Nurse wellness was mentioned vaguely. Customer discovery calls ran 45+ minutes of "what do you actually do?" Pipeline was zero.

## The Diagnosis

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The surface problem was positioning. The real problem was deeper.

*CalmWave was trying to fit its product into existing categories: clinical decision support, hospital operations software, alarm management systems. What it actually did didn't fit any of them. This wasn't a positioning problem. It was a category creation problem.*

Design contradicted narrative. Product prioritization was reactive. Messaging fractured across channels. Writing anything (a pitch deck, a sales one-pager, a product brief) required weeks of internal negotiation because there was no shared strategic foundation to reason from.

# The Work

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I designed the narrative architecture for a new category: Operations Health for Healthcare: the connective foundation that makes systemic operational fragmentation visible, interpretable, and actionable across hospital systems. The layer underneath clinical decision support, IT infrastructure, and staffing.

## Category Thesis

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Defined the problem space, competitive displacement logic, and why this category matters now; used to align product, sales, investors, and clinical partners

## Narrative Architecture

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Built audience-specific messaging frameworks for clinicians, ops leaders, C-suite, and investors; each with distinct entry points into the same category thesis

## Strategic Constraints

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Established binding rules (no jargon, no clinical taboos, no vague outcomes) enforced across 50+ deliverables and adopted by the full leadership team

## Visual Identity

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Led complete rebrand with agency partners: new identity, design system, and two website builds (full technical execution, not just creative direction)

## Product Integration

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Participated in executive roadmapping; category framework shaped feature sequencing from alarms → device management → data foundation → safety systems

## Thought Leadership

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Ghostwrote CEO content for Forbes, Fast Company, GeekWire, Inc.; designed experiential campaigns including a custom card game and sensory event environments

## AI-Powered Ops

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Deployed 6 custom GPTs (brand strategist, content marketer, ABM expert, GTM strategist) to accelerate narrative consistency across a lean team

# The Proof

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**\$0 → \$100M+**

Pipeline built from scratch

**\$15M**

Investment secured

**45 → 20 min**

Discovery call length

**\$10M**

Total contract value

External recognition included CB Insights Future Tech Hotspot, Digital Health 50, multiple GeekWire Awards, Inc. Best Workplaces, and national media coverage in TechCrunch, Axios, and Inc. Magazine.

*"Before the rebrand, our pitch meetings started with 30 minutes of confusion about what we do. After Ashley's work, prospects immediately understood the category and the value. It changed how we sell."*

– Darby Gore · Sales Operations, CalmWave

*"Ashley built a narrative system that gave us a distinct voice in a crowded market. The strategic constraints she established made our messaging immediately recognizable and trustworthy. For the first time, we had a foundation the whole company could reason from."*

– Dena Cook · Co-Founder, Signal Group (CalmWave's PR Team)

*"The narrative frameworks Ashley built for CalmWave reflected clinical realities so accurately that our physicians felt genuinely understood. In a market as skeptical of AI as healthcare, that's the difference between a product that gets trialed and one that gets adopted."*

– Peggy Pilon, BSN, MSN, RN · VP Clinical Insights, CalmWave

## What this demonstrates

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The hardest brand problem is creating the category before anyone knows it exists. That requires seeing what the product actually is before the company can articulate it, building the narrative logic that makes the category inevitable, and then executing across every surface (identity, product, sales, culture) until the story holds. This is the work I find most interesting: the transition moment, when a company has outgrown its original narrative but hasn't yet earned the bigger one it's reaching for.