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CASE STUDY · MARLUC SYNOPSIS

SignalFire Beacon AI

IMPLEMENTED 2013 ONWARDS · FINANCIAL SERVICES AND INSURANCE · US · BAND C · CLAIMED ONLY

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A San Francisco Bay Area venture firm founded in 2013 around Beacon AI, an in-house platform that ranks companies and people. By the firm's account it researches every deal with Beacon, uses it to find companies to contact and offers it to portfolio companies for hiring and sales leads. It raised a $1 billion fifth fund in 2025. No figures link Beacon to investment returns.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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Facts and figures are as reported by the sources listed below, which may be incomplete, self-reported or out of date. Check the original source before relying on any figure.

The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

AI-native company: built around AI from the start and attempting transformational change. It claims band A; MarLuc grades it on what is evidenced.

AI used: Proprietary machine learning platform (Beacon AI) that ranks companies and people, with large language models added from 2023.

Implemented: 2013 onwards. Grade: band C, Process change, Claimed only.

Headline result, as reported: Beacon AI used to research every deal and to help portfolio companies hire, by the firm's account; $1 billion fifth fund raised in April 2025

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 5 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

SignalFire. Venture capital firm founded in 2013 and based in the San Francisco Bay Area, investing from pre-seed to Series B; its fifth fund targets applied AI companies. Assets under management of $3 billion in 2025, per Crunchbase News. Staff numbers: Not reported; TechCrunch reported 13 people in 2015. Canvas block: 4. Operations and process. Also 6. Data and technology, 3. Customers and proposition.

Business challenge

The challenge. The firm says the growth in company formation makes it impossible to keep human eyes on everything. When it interviewed 500 founders and investors at the start, help with recruiting was the most common need, by the chief technology officer's account.

How it was addressed. SignalFire set out in 2013 to build a machine learning talent platform, which became Beacon AI. Its advisers and recruiting experts ranked talent in custom apps to create labelled training data, by the CTO's account. By 2023 Beacon tracked and ranked more than 80 million companies and 600 million people. The firm uses it to research every deal, to recommend founders and companies to contact, and to give portfolio companies free talent search and sales lead lists. From 2023 it added large language models to summarise companies, find similar companies, tag sectors and route companies to the right investor. It says it does not use them to automate outreach to founders or to summarise pitch decks in place of reading them. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Who implemented it

In-house (In-house): Built Beacon AI with its own engineers and data scientists, overseen by the chief technology officer.
The firm says it has used GPT and other open models; which providers and on what terms is not reported.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T8 Predictive / ML models, T5 Custom / fine-tuned models. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Beacon AI, GPT and other open models (as named by the firm).

Where it was built in: Built in-house and used across sourcing, research on every deal, routing companies to investors, and talent search and sales lead tools offered to portfolio companies.

What changed

Before: by the firm's account, venture firms support portfolio hiring through people and networks that do not scale. After: research on every deal, part of sourcing, and portfolio recruiting and sales support run through Beacon, with investors making the decisions. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

What it cost

Not reported. The firm says it runs language models only on a subset of the companies and people it tracks because classifying all of them would make costs skyrocket.

What it saved

Not reported as time or money. By the firm's account Beacon helped source dozens of investments (2024), and portfolio company EvenUp used it to source 100 candidates for a first product designer role, leading to two finalists and a hire (2023). [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Governance and control

The firm says it uses language models for internal data gathering rather than decision-making and communication, and limits them to data that is safe for ingestion. Investors make the decisions; Beacon ranks and routes. The CTO, Ilya Kirnos, oversees Beacon. No independent

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
The chief technology officer, Ilya Kirnos, oversees Beacon AI, by the firm's account. [2]

A1 · Safe use · Claimed
The firm limits language model use to data that is safe for ingestion and rules out automated outreach to founders. [1]

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
The firm says human experience and expertise are critical once it evaluates a startup, and uses language models for data gathering rather than decision-making. [1]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
Internal tests measured about 75% precision and recall for sector tagging; the firm says Beacon is fine-tuned daily with feedback from its investment, talent and data teams. [1]

A4 · Vendor AI · Claimed
The firm weighs off-the-shelf against in-house models for privacy, data moats and quality, and names data leakage as a risk of off-the-shelf models. [1]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described in the sources.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Not reported
Not reported.

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Coverage: Beacon tracks and ranks more than 80 million companies and 600 million people, by the firm's account.

– Data quality: language models tagged company sectors with about 75% precision and recall in the firm's tests, which it says compares well with human-curated datasets.

– Fundraising: a $1 billion fifth fund in 2025, which the founder called validation of the portfolio, per Crunchbase News.

DID NOT

– Finding similar companies with language models remains complex, by the firm's account, because two text descriptions can look alike while business models, customers and technologies differ.

– Cost limits use: the firm does not run language models across its full dataset.

– TechCrunch wrote in 2015 that no one yet knew whether the data could predict startup success; no later independent test was found.

UNPROVEN

– Whether investments sourced or screened with Beacon perform better than others.

– What share of the firm's investments came from Beacon.

– How much of the 2025 fundraising reflects Beacon rather than the firm's wider record, such as the sale of Frame.io to Adobe.

Timeline

2013 SignalFire founded and starts building a machine learning talent platform [1]

Oct 2015 TechCrunch reports Beacon draws on more than half a trillion data points [4]

Oct 2023 Firm describes adding large language models to Beacon AI [1]

Apr 2025 $1 billion fifth fund raised; assets under management $3 billion [3]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: B. Grade: C, Process change. Proof: Claimed only. Level of change: Process change.

Process change (Level 2, band C). The firm presents Beacon as the fabric of the whole firm, which would be operating model change (Level 3, band B); no figures show how far decisions, staffing or results depend on it.

Deal research, part of sourcing and portfolio recruiting support run through Beacon, by the firm's account: a process redesigned around AI (band C). The founder calls Beacon the fabric that stitches the firm together and the firm has a CTO and data scientists at its core, which it presents as an operating model change; no figures show how far decisions or results depend on Beacon.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

SignalFire combines a data platform with partner judgement, fund capital and a portfolio support offer, and its results cannot be split between Beacon and the rest. Its published figures describe the platform's scale and data quality, with no link to returns. Before copying the approach, a partner should ask what share of deals and portfolio value the platform drives, and what it costs to build and run against a conventional platform team.

1. Decide where AI informs decisions and where it never speaks for the firm.
2. Test data tasks such as sector tagging against a human-curated baseline.
3. Send only data that is safe to share to outside models.

Evidence

Score 1 of 4. Self-reported: the firm's own posts and the founder's statements to the press.

Evaluation method. Self-reported company statements and internal tests (sector tagging precision and recall); no baseline for investment results published.

Sources disagree. Beacon's scale is described differently over time: more than half a trillion data points from two million sources (TechCrunch, 2015); 40 datasets (the firm, 2023); 650 million people (Crunchbase News, 2025) against 600 million on the firm's own pages.

Status. Ongoing: the firm's website in November 2026 describes Beacon AI as used to find investments and to support portfolio hiring and go-to-market research.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/signalfire-beacon-ai

[1] SignalFire: VC GPT, how LLMs are strengthening SignalFire's in-house AI (October 2023)
https://signalfire.com/blog/signalfire-beacon-ai

[2] SignalFire: Why our venture firm has a CTO, by Ilya Kirnos (January 2024)
https://www.signalfire.com/blog/venture-capital-cto

[3] Crunchbase News: SignalFire raises $1 billion fund for applied AI (April 2025)
https://news.crunchbase.com/venture/signalfire-new-fund-seed-early-stage-applied-ai/

[4] TechCrunch: Watch Out, VCs: Chris Farmer Plans To Massively Disrupt The Industry (October 2015)
https://techcrunch.com/2015/10/22/watch-out-vcs-chris-farmer-says-hes-about-to-massively-disrupt-the-industry

[5] SignalFire: Beacon AI
https://www.signalfire.com/beacon-ai

SignalFire website: https://www.signalfire.com

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