

Price Action & Order Flow Deep Dive

Beyond Candlesticks: Reading Institutional Intent

Introduction

Most traders read candlesticks. Professionals read order flow.

Candlesticks show you what happened. Order flow shows you why it happened and who made it happen. This guide bridges traditional price action with institutional order flow concepts.

Part 1: The Limitations of Candlesticks

What Candlesticks Don't Tell You

A candlestick only shows four prices: Open, High, Low, Close.

Missing information: - How many trades occurred? - Were buyers or sellers more aggressive? - Did large orders absorb smaller ones? - Was volume front-loaded or back-loaded? - What happened inside the bar?

Example: Two Identical Candles, Different Reality

Candle A and Candle B look identical: - Both green - Same open, high, low, close - Same body size

But internally: - Candle A: Steady buying all bar - Candle B: Selling early, panic buying at close

Same candle, completely different story.

Part 2: Order Flow Fundamentals

How Orders Work

Every trade has a **maker** and a **taker**:

MAKER	TAKER
Adds liquidity	Removes liquidity
Limit order	Market order
Gets filled	Fills against
Patient	Aggressive

Price moves when takers overwhelm makers.

The Bid-Ask Spread

```
Ask $100.10 — Where sellers wait (offers)
|
|   ← Spread (market maker profit zone)
|
Bid $100.05 — Where buyers wait (bids)
```

Crossing the spread: - Buy market order hits ask → price upticks - Sell market order hits bid → price downticks

Who Moves Price?

Aggressive buyers (market buy orders) hit the ask → price up **Aggressive sellers** (market sell orders) hit the bid → price down

Limit orders don't move price. Market orders do.

Part 3: Reading the Order Book

Level 2 / Depth of Market (DOM)

Price	Bid Size	Ask Size
\$100.15		500
\$100.10		200
\$100.05	300	
\$100.00	800	← Large bid (support)
\$99.95	150	

What to Look For

Large orders (icebergs): - Visible size that regenerates when hit - Institution hiding true size - Strong support/resistance

Order imbalance: - Heavy bids, light asks = bullish - Heavy asks, light bids = bearish

Spoofing (illegal but common): - Large orders that disappear when approached - Don't rely on visible size alone

Part 4: Time & Sales (The Tape)

Reading the Tape

Time & Sales shows every executed trade:

Time	Price	Size	Side
09:31:45	100.10	150	Buy
09:31:44	100.05	50	Sell
09:31:43	100.10	300	Buy ← Large buy
09:31:42	100.05	25	Sell
09:31:41	100.00	1000	Buy ← Very large buy

What Tape Reading Reveals

PATTERN	MEANING
Large prints at ask	Aggressive buying
Large prints at bid	Aggressive selling
Rapid small prints	Retail activity
Slow large prints	Institutional activity
Size at one level	Absorption

Tape Reading Tips

1. **Speed matters** — Fast tape = high participation
2. **Size matters** — Large prints > small prints
3. **Side matters** — At bid vs. at ask
4. **Persistence matters** — One large print vs. sustained

Part 5: Footprint Charts

What Is a Footprint Chart?

A footprint shows volume traded at each price within a candle.

Standard Candle:



Footprint:

[Bid x Ask]

| 10 x 50 ← More selling
| 30 x 25
| 45 x 40
| 60 x 20 ← More buying
| 25 x 15

Reading Footprint Patterns

Absorption:

Price		Bid × Ask	
\$100.10		50 × 200	← Sellers hitting bids
\$100.05		45 × 180	← But price not moving
\$100.00		40 × 150	← Someone absorbing sells

Result: Likely to reverse up (buyers absorbing)

Initiative:

Price		Bid × Ask	
\$100.20		80 × 30	← Aggressive buyers
\$100.15		90 × 25	← Hitting asks
\$100.10		100 × 20	← Taking liquidity

Result: Price likely continues up

Key Footprint Metrics

METRIC	CALCULATION	USE
Delta	Ask Vol - Bid Vol	Direction bias
Imbalance	One side >3x other	Aggressive activity
CVD	Cumulative Delta	Trend health

Part 6: Volume Delta Analysis

Cumulative Volume Delta (CVD)

CVD is the running total of delta:

```
Bar 1: Delta +100 → CVD: +100
Bar 2: Delta -50 → CVD: +50
Bar 3: Delta +200 → CVD: +250
Bar 4: Delta -100 → CVD: +150
```

CVD Patterns

Healthy Uptrend:

```
Price: ↗ ↗ ↗ ↗
CVD:   ↗ ↗ ↗ ↗ (rising)
= Confirmed, continue trading
```

Divergence Warning:

```
Price: ↗ ↗ ↗ ↗ (higher high)
CVD:   ↗ → ↘ ↘ (lower high)
= Buyers exhausting, reversal possible
```

Accumulation:

```
Price: → → → → (flat/down)
CVD:   ↗ ↗ ↗ ↗ (rising)
= Smart money buying quietly
```

Part 7: Institutional Order Flow Concepts

How Institutions Trade

Institutions can't buy 1M shares at once. They:

1. **Split orders** — Many small chunks
2. **Use algorithms** — TWAP, VWAP, POV
3. **Hide size** — Icebergs, dark pools

4. Accumulate/distribute — Over hours/days

Spotting Institutional Activity

SIGN	WHAT IT MEANS
Sustained one-sided delta	Persistent buying/selling
Absorption at levels	Defending a price
Unusual volume at key levels	Institutional interest
CVD divergence	Hidden accumulation/distribution
Large prints on tape	Block trades

Institutional Tactics

Accumulation: - Buy on dips - Absorb selling at support - Slowly build position - Break out when loaded

Distribution: - Sell into rallies - Absorb buying at resistance - Slowly exit position - Break down when unloaded

Part 8: Market Structure Through Order Flow

Support as Demand Zone

Traditional view: "Price bounced here before." Order flow view: "Buyers defend this level with size."

```
Price approaches support
↓
Tape shows large bids
↓
Sellers absorbed (footprint imbalance)
↓
CVD stays positive despite down move
↓
SUPPORT VALID
```

Resistance as Supply Zone

Traditional view: "Price rejected here before." Order flow view: "Sellers defend this level with size."

```
Price approaches resistance
↓
Tape shows large offers
↓
Buyers absorbed (footprint imbalance)
↓
CVD stays negative despite up move
↓
RESISTANCE VALID
```

Breakout Validation

Valid Breakout: - Delta confirms direction - CVD expanding - Tape shows aggressive hitting
- No absorption against move

Failed Breakout: - Delta diverges - CVD doesn't expand - Tape shows absorption - Size defending level

Part 9: Combining Price Action & Order Flow

Enhanced Candlestick Reading

Hammer + Order Flow:

Hammer candle appears

Check:

- Was there absorption at low? (bullish)
- Did CVD diverge? (bullish)
- Large bid prints on tape? (bullish)
- Or just low volume bounce? (weak)

Engulfing + Order Flow:

Bullish engulfing appears

Check:

- Delta strongly positive? (confirmed)
- Volume higher than prior bars? (confirmed)
- Sustained buying on tape? (confirmed)
- Or one large print then nothing? (weak)

Order Flow Signals

SETUP	CONFIRMATION
Hammer at support	Absorption + positive delta
Breakout	Delta expansion + tape aggression
Trend continuation	CVD confirming + sustained delta
Reversal	CVD divergence + absorption

Part 10: Practical Application

Pre-Trade Checklist

- [] What does CVD say about trend health?
- [] Any divergence between price and CVD?

- [] What's happening at key levels (absorption)?
- [] Is the tape aggressive in my direction?
- [] Does footprint show initiative or response?

Trade Management with Order Flow

Entry: - Wait for delta confirmation - Enter after absorption completes - Size into aggression

Stop: - Beyond absorption zone - Where delta shifts against you - Invalidation of order flow thesis

Exit: - Delta divergence against position - Absorption at target - CVD flattening or reversing

Part 11: Tools Required

For Order Flow Analysis

TOOL	PURPOSE	PLATFORM
Footprint charts	See inside candles	Sierra Chart, ATAS
CVD indicator	Track cumulative delta	Most platforms
DOM/Level 2	See order book	Broker platforms
Time & Sales	Read the tape	Any platform
Plutus Flow	Integrated delta	TradingView/SP

Simplified Approach

If you can't access full order flow tools: - Use Plutus Flow for delta - Watch volume on candles
 - Note candle context (where, not just what) - Study absorption through wicks

Part 12: Integration with Signal Pilot

Pentarch + Order Flow

SIGNAL	ORDER FLOW CONFIRMATION
TD	CVD divergence, absorption at lows
IGN	Delta expansion, aggressive tape
WRN	CVD divergence, initiative fading
CAP	Delta exhaustion, climax volume
BDN	Delta collapse, selling tape

Janus + Order Flow

JANUS SIGNAL	ORDER FLOW CONFIRMATION
Sweep	Absorption at sweep level
Reclaim	Delta shift after sweep

Part 13: Summary

Key Principles

- 1. Candlesticks are summaries** — Order flow is the detail
- 2. Aggressive orders move price** — Makers set; takers take
- 3. Delta reveals conviction** — Who's winning right now
- 4. CVD shows trend health** — Confirmation or divergence
- 5. Absorption is critical** — Size defending levels
- 6. Tape tells the story** — Watch real-time flow

7. Context matters most — Same print means different things

Order Flow Hierarchy

```
Level 1: Volume (participation)
Level 2: Delta (direction bias)
Level 3: CVD (cumulative conviction)
Level 4: Absorption (defense/offense)
Level 5: Tape reading (real-time intent)
```

Learning Path

1. Master volume analysis first
2. Add delta to your analysis
3. Study CVD patterns
4. Learn to spot absorption
5. Practice tape reading (futures recommended)

Order flow is a deep skill. It takes months to develop intuition. Start simple, add complexity gradually.

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