Microsoft

The Quick Reference Card That Sold $120 Million of Windows

And changed how Microsoft sold to Corporate Accounts.

By Alexander Rublowsky

4,000+	$120M	76%	Adopted
NEW CUSTOMERS	NEW REVENUE	NET-NEW GROWTH	ACROSS MICROSOFT

Executive Summary

Microsoft Corporate Accounts served companies with 500 to 5,000 seats through a high-volume telesales organization selling the full Microsoft portfolio. It was an important business, but it had never become a meaningful source of growth for Windows. Inside the Windows organization, Corporate Accounts was seen as a difficult assignment with limited upside. Several leaders had tried to improve it without changing its trajectory. I was warned it was not worth investing significant career capital.

I saw something different. Sellers had 30 minutes with a prospect and tools built for long enterprise sales cycles. With no workable methodology, reps sitting in the same room used different scripts, explained licensing differently, and sometimes told customers things that were not true. The business was not broken. It was constrained by removable friction, and removable friction is an invitation.

Choosing Revenue Over the Problem List

When I started, my counterpart in the Corporate Accounts sales organization came to me with a list of ten things he wanted fixed. They were legitimate concerns. They were also systemic problems with little hope of quick resolution or a path to revenue growth. He had years in the role and knew the business better than I did, so I listened carefully. Then I looked at the list and told him:

> *"We're not going to do any of these things. We're going to drive revenue, and no one will remember these problems existed."*

It was an aggressive position for someone new to the business. But the list described the issues the organization had learned to manage around. It did not explain why customers were not buying Windows. Six months later we laughed about that conversation, because it had proved true. The problems had not disappeared. They simply stopped defining the business once revenue began to move.

The Sales Motion Did Not Fit the Sale

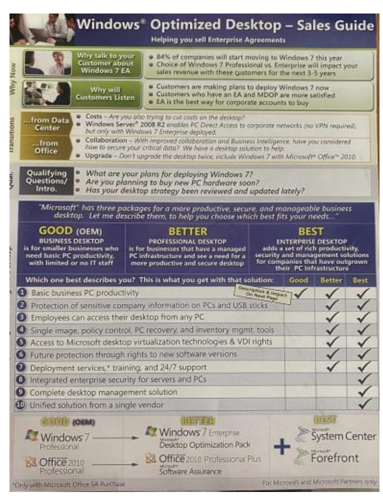
The discovery work began in the call centers. I visited multiple locations, listened to customer calls, and watched sellers try to navigate Windows conversations. Effort was not the problem. A Corporate Accounts seller carried the entire Microsoft portfolio, and in a typical 30-minute call had to understand the customer's desktop and IT challenges, communicate the Windows offer, explain the licensing path, respond to objections, and create a next step.

The Windows team had given them high-quality enterprise materials: white papers, presentations, case studies, detailed value propositions. Tools built for a long, consultative sales cycle, and nearly impossible to use on a short call. So sellers improvised, and improvisation created inconsistency. Some understood the value of an Enterprise Agreement. Others gave prospects incomplete or inaccurate information. Everyone assumed sellers could sell Windows because everyone knew Windows. In reality, they had never been equipped to sell it in this environment.

The answer was not more content. It was a simpler way to use the content Microsoft already had.

Building the Quick Reference Card

We designed the motion around the customer conversation rather than the product organization, and we built it on a Good, Better, Best frame that did something subtle: it told customers they were already in a good place. The Windows they owned through OEM or ad hoc licensing was Good. Our goal was to help them improve their environment with Better or Best, the richer capabilities that came with an Enterprise Agreement. Either step was a win, no customer was told they were doing it wrong, and the card existed to communicate the value of those two steps up.



The card organized the call around the most common customer needs and the Windows capabilities that answered them, and it armed sellers with upsell questions aligned to those same issues, designed to open the prospect's mind to what a great desktop experience could look like. Each need came with the evidence, a customer example, and the right Good, Better, or Best recommendation. A generalist did not need to become a Windows expert. They needed to hold a credible Windows conversation while the customer was still on the phone, and now they could.

Winning Over the Owners of the Message

Creating the card was the easy part. Windows Product Management controlled messaging tightly, and for good reason: at Windows scale, consistency mattered, and they had invested heavily in the positioning. To them, a quick reference card looked like simplification at the expense of accuracy, and they fought it at nearly every stage. Weeks of reviews compared the card line by line against the enterprise materials. Same words. Same proof points. Same customer value. What changed was whether a seller could use it in a live call.

What I really needed was the card in sellers' hands, because the sellers were the proof it would work. I sent the draft to a group of them, and the feedback came back positive. There was no formal approval process to follow, and more reviews were not going to drive revenue. So I turned the sellers' response into a team win: a widely distributed success email thanking everyone, with Product Management, the group that had fought hardest, cast as the hero that made it work. That thank-you created an approval that was never going to arrive on its own, and the credit made it stick.

> *I declared victory, but gave them the win. I did not need credit for winning the argument. I needed the organization to own the outcome.*

A Rollout Designed Around the Objections

The rollout was built around the two objections we knew were coming. The first was time. These sellers owned the full Microsoft portfolio, and any Windows program demanding certification or repeated training would lose the competition for their attention. So we did not teach the content. We taught sellers how to read the card, and training took 30 minutes.

The second was autonomy. An English card solved the problem only for English-speaking markets, and every country had the right to decline the new motion. So we did not push. For every geography that opted in, corporate funded the translation, localization, and printing, and backed the rollout with a seller incentive. Our only requirement was that each country send us a copy of its finished card and report their local wins to earn the incentives. The incentives were big enough to be meaningful to the seller, and small enough that the business never felt the burden.

> *We did not mandate adoption. We made adoption easy, and easy won every geography in the company.*

Cards began arriving in languages I could not read, and we used them as evidence of traction: each new card made it easier for the next geography to see the value of adopting. Once the program was global, it nearly ran itself: train the trainers, fund the localizations, report the results.

From a Windows Program to a Microsoft Model

As results became visible, other business units came asking. The Office, Windows Server, SQL Server, Exchange, and Dynamics teams had been handing Corporate Accounts the same kind of enterprise content Windows had, with the same mismatch. Within months, Good, Better, Best cards were appearing across Microsoft, adapted to each product's customer concerns, proof points, and objections. A Windows tool had become a repeatable company model.

Business Outcomes

The motion delivered more than 4,000 new customers, $120 million in new revenue, and 76 percent net-new growth, and the work earned a Microsoft Gold Star award for changing how the company approached Corporate Accounts.

Corporate Accounts had never been a low-opportunity business. It was a business held back by friction between the complexity of the offer and the reality of the sales environment. Once the friction was removed, growth followed.

Three Leadership Lessons

The revenue was the result, and the Gold Star was the recognition. But what I actually carried out of Corporate Accounts were three lessons that have traveled with me through every transformation since.

Everyone needs to win, or no one wins. Product Management needed its investment honored. Sellers needed something they could actually use. Countries needed the choice, the funding, and the incentive. The program worked because every group could find its own win inside it, and giving Product Management the credit mattered as much as the card itself.

Simple makes everything simpler. The card was easy to train, easy to localize, and easy to manage globally. Simplicity was not the absence of rigor. It was the result of doing the hard work required to make complexity usable.

Change requires tenacity. Product Management resisted. Sellers had habits. Every geography could say no. People rarely resist change because the idea is wrong; more often, the new approach challenges something familiar, valued, or under their control. Getting through that takes patience, judgment, and the conviction to keep pushing when the opportunity is real.