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The Revenue Engine

License to Hunt:

Turning Large Business Services Account Wins into Actual Revenue

Executive Summary

- Many service businesses win national Master Service Agreements (MSAs) that promise broad access to customers, but fall short when local execution fails.
- This "license to hunt" problem stems from weak coordination, limited sales capability in the field, and misaligned incentives between national and local teams.
- Closing this gap can unlock 20-50% revenue growth from existing accounts within 12-18 months.
- Two proven models, dedicated sales overlays and embedded branch-level commercial ownership, offer solutions that can successfully impact near term revenue.
- The key: equip local sales teams with the tools, accountability, and support to turn national relationships into profitable growth.

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When Winning Isn't Enough

Across services businesses, from HR services to industrial distribution and everywhere in between, companies spend months – sometimes years – winning hard-fought Master Service Agreements (MSAs) with national, multi-site clients. These agreements offer a "license to hunt": the right to pursue opportunities across every store, site, or region under that banner.

But too often, these lofty expectations never materialize. Sales projections tied to these wins regularly fall short. Revenue is left on the table. And the culprit isn't the MSA, it's what happens after it's signed.

In two-stage sales models, the corporate team secures the MSA, but only the right to sell has been secured. It's up to local branches to convert that right into revenue. Too often, that's where the gap emerges. There is limited (or no) coordination between the central teams that win the MSA and the local branches that need to execute. The frontline teams – operators, techs, and service leads – excel at service delivery, but often lack the time, tools, or selling DNA to drive growth.

Getting it right has real upside - businesses that close this execution gap regularly see 20-50% increases in revenue from existing accounts within 12-18 months.

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This article explores the causes behind the revenue shortfall and offers a path forward to unlock the full commercial potential of national agreements.

Why Two-Stage Models Fail

Earning the license to hunt is only the first step. Capturing its full value requires closing a number of gaps that appear once execution shifts from corporate to the field. In our work with clients, we consistently see six breakdowns:

1. **Local Sales Skill and Execution Gaps**
   At the branch level, the people closest to the customer – technicians, drivers, operators – are often the least commercially equipped. They deliver quality service but aren't trained to identify or pursue upsell opportunities.

> **The promise of the "license to hunt" goes unfulfilled because the hunters don't know how – or don't have the tools – to pursue the opportunity.**

Even when dedicated sales reps exist, they often lack the technical fluency to close deals or default to acting as "door openers" rather than dealmakers. The promise of the "license to hunt" goes unfulfilled because the hunters lack the tools and training to pursue the opportunity.

2. **Fragmented Coordination Between National and Local Teams**:
   The collaboration between national account teams and local branches is often unclear or nonexistent. There's no shared account planning process, no individual account plans and playbooks, no clear ownership for post-MSA activation, and little to no feedback loop to drive continuous improvement.

   The result?
   Branches are unaware of or ignore the national win, and corporate assumes local teams are following through – neither is right.

3. **Misaligned Goals and Incentives**
   Branch teams are typically measured on operational efficiency and local P&L. National sales teams are rewarded for signing MSAs. But who owns activation and growth *after* the signature?

   Without aligned KPIs, comp structures, and shared targets:

   - Local teams deprioritize national accounts that strain their margins and result in less sales compensation than pursuing local opportunities.
   - Central teams "celebrate and forget" the deal after it's closed, while local teams get none of the glory and all of the headaches associated with operationalizing.
   - Commissions become contentious, confusing, or counterproductive, sometimes even incentivizing reps to actively prioritize non-MSA accounts.

4. **Weak Commercial Segmentation and Coverage Strategy**
   Many companies approach local sales without a structured segmentation model, focusing on familiar, low-effort local accounts over strategic MSA targets. They lack data or insight to distinguish between engaged, underpenetrated, and inactive locations.

   Without segmentation and means to prioritize, sales efforts are diluted, uncoordinated, and inefficient.

5. **Incomplete Integration of Acquisitions**
   For acquisitive firms, these problems are magnified. Newly acquired branches operate on disparate systems, capabilities, and go-to-market models. Inconsistent visibility makes it difficult to track account penetration or replicate best practices.

   Some branches may be commercial; others may be operational only. Without effective GTM integration, even well-structured national agreements can stall in execution.

6. **Pricing Disconnects Between Corporate and Local**
   Central teams often grant discounts as a "give" without any associated "get," while standardized national pricing often overlooks local cost realities. Labor rates may vary 2–3x between regions, leaving some branches unable to serve national accounts profitably.

   When local leaders see national accounts as financial liabilities rather than growth engines, participation and performance inevitably suffer.

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Each of these breakdowns erodes value in different ways, but together they create a systemic execution gap. The national team may have secured the license to hunt, but without alignment, enablement, and accountability, the hunters on the ground are left without a map, or the motivation to use it.

Designing the Right Solution Model

The right answer to bridging the national–local gap in two-stage sales models isn't one-size-fits-all. No matter what the approach, MSAs must be properly established as "win/win" at the national and local level, with pricing, incentives, and processes that support collaboration and positive results for the business. Companies must then match their go-to-market design to the realities of their customer decision-making, service delivery, and internal capabilities.

We see organizations that successfully execute two-stage sales motions use one of two approaches:

Model 1: Dedicated Sales Overlay

In this model, the local branch team focuses on operations, while a separate sales team owns commercial execution within the branch's geography or industry segment.

When It Works	Advantages
The offering is **moderately to highly technical.**	Commercial skills are concentrated in professionals trained to sell.
Deal sizes are sufficiently large to justify dedicated sales resources.	Overlay team can specialize by vertical, product line, or customer archetype.
The branches lack the bandwidth or skills to drive commercial activity.	More control and visibility from the center.

Model 2: Embedded Commercial Responsibility at the Branch Level

Here, branch operators own both service and sales responsibilities – and are enabled to do so through training, data, and incentives.

When It Works	Advantages
The offering is relatively **simple and repeatable.**	No new headcount required.
Customers make frequent site-level decisions.	Higher service-to-sales conversion due to existing presence at the site.
The economics don't support an incremental sales layer.	
There is already regular site access through service technicians, delivery drivers, or other operational roles.	Reinforces branch accountability for revenue, not just operations.

Choosing the Right Model: Key Questions to Ask

No two organizations face the same customer dynamics or internal realities. Selecting the right approach, or blend of approaches, depends on where buying decisions are made, how services are delivered, and what capabilities exist in the field.

Leadership teams should evaluate two sets of questions to determine which model best fits their business:

Customer and Market Dynamics

1. Where are buying decisions made – corporate, regional, or site level?
2. What does the MSA actually grant? Is it a mandate, a preferred vendor status, or simply a pricing framework?
3. How strictly is the contract enforced by the customer? Do sites conform to corporate purchasing direction?
4. Is the offering differentiated enough to build competitive advantage at the local level?
5. Does the customer outsource execution, or operate through internal teams?

Internal Readiness

1. How technical is the product or service? Can a field technician or generalist credibly lead a sales conversation?
2. Is there sufficient deal size and margin to fund a dedicated sales role?
3. Are people already on-site who could be trained to identify and act on opportunity?
4. Do branch-level incentives align with revenue growth from national accounts?
5. Do we have the data infrastructure to support segmentation, targeting, and performance tracking?

The answers reveal whether the commercial engine should lean toward a centralized overlay, a distributed branch-led model, or a hybrid that combines elements of both.

Hybrid Models: Tailoring by Segment

In practice, few organizations fit neatly into one model. The most effective systems blend elements of both, adapting coverage and accountability by segment, customer type, or geography. This could look like:

- Assigning overlay reps only in high-density markets.
- Enabling branch managers to sell core offerings, while routing complex solutions through a technical overlay.
- Using central resources to manage the top 10% of accounts by opportunity, while branches handle the rest.

> **The key is intentionality: Clear roles, aligned metrics, and a scalable system for coordination between the national and local levels.**

Case Study: Aligning National Accounts and Boots on the Ground to Drive Measurable Growth

A ~$500M industrial services firm offered parts and repair services to thousands of manufacturing and logistics sites across the U.S. The company routinely signed national agreements with customers, but the results were underwhelming. Revenue growth had stalled, margins were eroding, and what leadership called a "strategic account" program was little more than a reactive discounting tool.

Initial State: Discounts Without Direction

The company's approach to national accounts was fundamentally flawed. Corporate sales leaders routinely granted discounts to retain at-risk customers, but there were no volume targets, exclusivity commitments, or activation plans.

At the branch level, the disconnect was even sharper. Many teams didn't know these national agreements existed, and when they did, they did not have the commercial capabilities to capitalize on them. Field "outside sales" reps were mostly service coordinators and delivery drivers. They handled orders, resolved issues, and maintained relationships based on convenience rather than commercial strategy. With no training, prioritization, or performance metrics tied to growth, they defaulted to reactive order-taking. The local branches lacked the commercial capabilities to succeed, and high turnover only deepened the problem.

Organizationally, there was no feedback loop between national and local teams, no account plans, and no way to track penetration or share of wallet. The result was a widening gap between corporate ambition and field execution: discounts expanded, margins shrank, and the commercial promise of the "license to hunt" went largely unrealized.

Strategic Intervention: Building an Optimized Commercial Model

Blue Ridge Partners partnered with the firm's leadership to redesign the approach from the ground up:

1. **Overhauling the National Accounts Team**
   A dedicated national accounts team was formed at the corporate level to win national agreements with purpose. Reps were assigned to specific verticals to enable deeper specialization and relationship-building.

2. **Improving the Commercial Function in the Branches**
   At the branch level, the outside sales role was overhauled and the existing team was upskilled with commercial training. Customer service and operational tasks were removed from the reps' purview to enable them to focus on commercial activity.

3. **License to Hunt with Requirements**
   New national contracts required customer contact info at each facility, warm introductions to site managers, and explicit commitments from corporate to communicate preferred-supplier status down to locations.

4. **Inside-Out Coordination, Account Planning, and Team Selling**
   Cross-functional workflows were created to ensure that both corporate and the field had visibility and alignment. Key account plans targeted specific actions, and sales plays to facilitate team selling were developed.

5. **Segmentation Framework**
   National accounts were grouped by vertical and scored by white space opportunity. The top-tier "Supernova" segment represented over **$3 billion** in uncovered potential.

6. **Compensation Redesign**
   Account reps were rewarded not just for revenue, but for activation milestones – e.g., securing local contacts, converting new locations, and expanding product penetration.

The upside is real and measurable with these types of transformations. Businesses that close this execution gap regularly see **20-50% increases in revenue from existing accounts** within 12-18 months.

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Conclusion: Don't Stop at the License to Hunt

Winning a national agreement is just the beginning. Execution at the branch level determines whether that contract becomes a growth engine or a missed opportunity.

When companies optimize their commercial model, align central and local teams, and equip the field with the tools to sell, results follow. Companies stop leaving money on the table and instead capture the full value of the national relationships they've already earned.

For private equity-backed companies, the outcome is transformative: faster time to value, stronger top-line growth, and a more scalable commercial engine for the next stage of ownership. For leaders evaluating how to close this national-local execution gap, Blue Ridge Partners' Business Services practice can serve as a sounding board as you assess which model best fits your organization.

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Why Blue Ridge Partners?

At Blue Ridge Partners, we focus exclusively on helping companies accelerate profitable revenue growth – the #1 driver of value creation. We've earned high marks from private equity firms by delivering material, rapid, and cost-effective results for their portfolio companies.

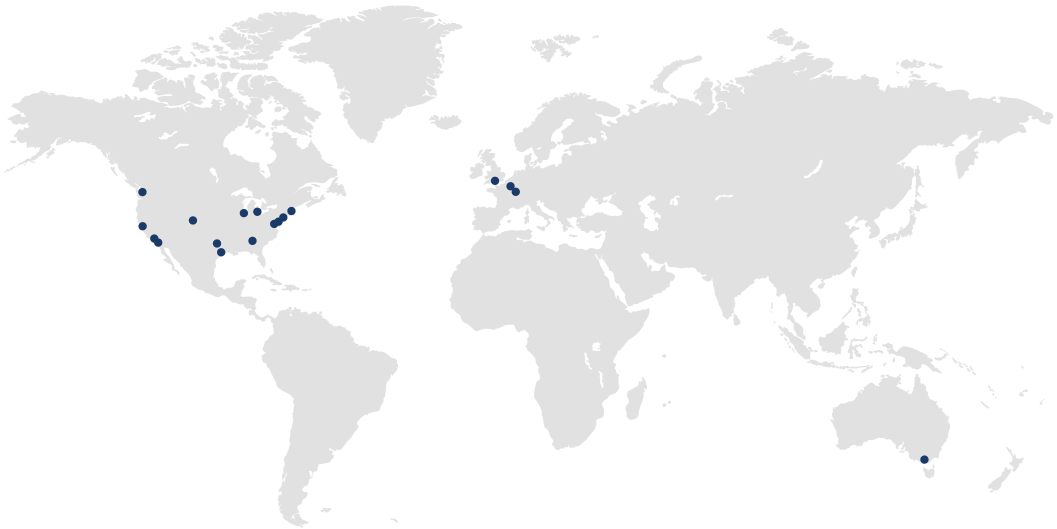
Our work spans value creation planning, commercial model transitions, strategic pricing, sales effectiveness, and commercial due diligence. Our Managing Directors combine top-tier strategy consulting and operating experience, and we're known for rolling up our sleeves, taking a pragmatic, hands-on approach, and focusing on the "how" of execution to drive measurable P&L impact.

Increasingly, we help clients leverage Commercial AI to accelerate growth. Through our Commercial AI Center of Excellence (CoE), we guide AI investments toward real business problems and commercial metrics – not just tools – to ensure tangible results.

Since 2002, we've partnered with over 130 top-tier PE firms and 1,300 companies worldwide to create lasting value across the investment lifecycle.

For further information please contact us at info@blueridgepartners.com or visit us at www.blueridgepartners.com.

Our Locations



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