

Channel Re-Architecture: Building for What Comes Next

Executive Summary

Millions of pounds were already moving through an established indirect channel. That did not mean the channel was functioning as the business thought.

It had never been properly understood until a new ambition to utilise it for growth prompted closer examination. This exposed a harder picture: revenue often followed existing demand, trust with resellers had weakened, and belief inside the manufacturer was uneven.

Rebuilding the channel meant changing both sides of the relationship at once — creating more value for partners while asking more of them, and strengthening internal belief while revenue still had to be delivered.

The continued vitality of an indirect sales channel depends on transparency, loyalty and communication in both directions. Without these principles, the channel merely exists.

The foundations are stronger and the outlook better. The work exposed a broader truth: commercial architecture can only move as fast as the organisation around it is prepared to support, decide and act.

The work is not finished. The progress is real.

1. Not Every Inheritance Is an Asset

The Legacy Position

The channel was mature in existence, but not in design. Over many years, reseller accounts had accumulated as businesses qualified for credit, bought product and received commercial terms. Larger spend generally brought larger discounts, whilst historic rebates and concessions tended to remain in place.

There were no meaningful commercial agreements, little structured governance and limited expectation beyond the transaction itself. Even relationships with the largest ‘partners’ were inconsistent. The business knew what resellers bought, but much less about how they operated, where the brand sat within their priorities or what actually caused customers to buy.

Sales moved through the channel without necessarily being driven by it. Existing brand demand did much of the work.

At the same time, direct and indirect sales activities often competed, rarely communicated and shared little common ground. Resellers had substantial freedom to represent the brand, but accountability was weak, support inconsistent, and there was no compelling reason to invest in proactively promoting the manufacturer’s offerings.

The Review

The first task was not to start changing partners. It was to understand what really existed.

Conversations moved beyond the usual purchasing and commercial contacts to include senior sales leaders and people closer to how resellers actually went to market. The picture changed quickly as the channel’s bones became visible.

Many partners could fulfil orders but had little capability to generate them. They were not routinely equipped to identify opportunities, position the manufacturer’s offer or switch business from competitors. Several also viewed the manufacturer’s direct sales organisation less as an ally than as a competitor.

The review exposed years of accumulated frustration. Some relationships had deteriorated gradually enough that the manufacturer didn't know how much trust had been lost.

It also revealed an important distinction: channel revenue and channel-created revenue were miles apart.

Before expecting more from the reseller network, the business first needed to understand what would make partners willing and able to deliver more. A pause was required before any reset.

The Mountain Comes into View

What initially looked like a channel restructuring and reinvigoration exercise became something much more complex.

Improving partner selection and commercial terms was only one part of the transformation. The surrounding commercial system also had to change, making expectations explicit, performance visible and reseller and manufacturer teams better able to operate as one commercial unit.

The most difficult work was internal.

Long-established assumptions about reseller value had to be challenged. Direct sales teams needed to see an indirect sale as a business win rather than lost margin. Leadership sponsorship had to become visible enough to change behaviour, not simply endorse the strategy in meetings. Time mattered.

There was also genuine commercial risk. Consolidating activity through fewer, better partners could improve capability and accountability, but the transition would not necessarily happen neatly or immediately.

The realisation was straightforward: this was not simply a sales channel problem. It was an organisational change programme, whilst millions of pounds in annual revenue still had to be delivered.

2. Rebuilding Trust. Building Belief

A Different Relationship

The diagnosis made one thing clear: asking resellers for more without changing what the business offered in return was not simply unlikely to work. It risked reinforcing the distrust already present and turning ambition into entitlement — expecting more value from partners without creating more value for them.

The reset started with conversation, but it had to become tangible. Commercial agreements were introduced where little formal structure had existed before, setting expectations on both sides rather than simply protecting the manufacturer. Performance-based rebates created a reason to prioritise the brand, while regular reviews began to expose where opportunity was being won, lost or ignored.

Relationships also widened beyond purchasing contacts. Sales leaders, account managers and technical teams became more connected, helping move the conversation from price and availability towards market opportunity, capability and shared customers.

Change is a basic word. Intentional change against an ingrained status quo is materially different — and exponentially difficult.

Support had to improve alongside accountability. A network of defined access tools and touch points into the manufacturer were developed to give partners a genuine chance to influence demand rather than simply fulfil it.

Trust could not be demanded. The business had to give resellers reasons to believe the relationship would now work differently.

Making the Model Credible

The external reset could only go so far if the organisation continued to view indirect sales with suspicion and ambivalence.

Internally, the harder task was building belief that a sale through a reseller could still be a good sale. Margin given to the channel had often been viewed as value surrendered rather than payment for capability, reach, service and commercial access.

That distinction mattered. The objective was not to favour indirect over direct sales, but to stop treating the two routes as natural opponents. The better question became: which route gives the strongest outcome — not just for this sale, but for the customer's continued access to the brand, regardless of avenue?

Personnel across the commercial and operational system needed to understand how the model was supposed to work and why — not to convince them, but to clear away the assumptions of the past and reset for a different path.

Progress was visible. Reseller conversations increased, internal discussion became more constructive and some working relationships changed materially.

But belief remained uneven. Personal support helped the programme move; it did not yet amount to full organisational sponsorship.

Building While Trading

The rebuild had to happen inside a live commercial system.

Building the new model also meant designing the commercial infrastructure around it, whilst millions of pounds in annual revenue still had to be delivered. Some elements became established; others remained partially built. Adoption was fragmented; the uniform pull in the same direction was still missing.

As the work progressed, the original brief became increasingly inadequate as a description of the task. What had looked like a channel restructuring programme had become a cross-functional transformation with more dependencies, decisions and moving parts than initially understood. The scale of the unknowns grew with it. New work continued to surface, bringing additional effort that had not been visible at the outset. The foundations had to be completed properly; otherwise, whatever came next would still be built on instability.

Additional programme-management resource was eventually introduced alongside the existing commercial team. It increased capacity, coordination, accountability, and perspective.

That mattered.

The architecture was becoming clearer. So were the organisational conditions limiting how quickly it could be completed.

3. Architecture Is Not Enough

Visibility Changes Behaviour

As the programme grew, so did the gap between what was visible from the outside and what was required to keep it moving.

Additional programme-management support improved capacity and coordination, but its greater value was independent visibility. A second experienced person could see the scale of the work, challenge it objectively and validate whether the delivery risk was real.

That changed the conversation. The programme was no longer being judged through one person's assessment, and wider acceptance gradually brought greater trust. Frequent intervention reduced and the team had more space to operate.

There was a broader lesson in that. Keeping something moving can hide how close it is to being overloaded. Continued activity is not always evidence that resource, structure or expectations are right. Progress can happen whilst important things are left behind.

The same applied to sponsorship. Personal goodwill helped enormously, but goodwill and organisational belief are not the same thing. Sustainable change required the programme to become something the organisation understood and supported, rather than something individuals helped because they trusted the people carrying it.

When Governance Becomes Friction

The programme also exposed a wider tension between authority and execution.

Many decisions required approval from increasingly senior levels, while the people holding that authority had limited time to make them. Decisions could wait long enough for circumstances to change. When they resurfaced, the original case sometimes needed to be explained again, reconsidered or rebuilt.

A decision delayed long enough becomes a different decision.

The consequence was greater than lost time. Decision friction consumed energy, slowed opportunity, created rework and sometimes weakened the quality of the eventual decision because the environment in which it had originally been made no longer existed.

Governance still mattered. The answer was not unrestricted autonomy. But authority, accountability and execution capacity needed to be better connected. The business's actions needed to match its vision. If something is declared a priority, the organisation must treat it like one.

The programme did not create this organisational friction; it exposed it at greater intensity. And as the commercial architecture became stronger, these surrounding conditions increasingly determined how quickly the intended behaviours could take hold.

Better, Not Finished

The transformation is not complete. Some elements are established, others remain partially built, and adoption is still fragmented. The internal belief required to make the model feel natural rather than actively managed has further to travel.

But incomplete does not mean unchanged.

The channel now has clearer expectations, stronger relationships and a more credible commercial foundation than it did a year earlier. Resellers are better connected to the business, conversations have moved beyond transactions, and there is greater understanding that the route to market may be indirect, but the relationship should not be — working together directly to create demand, prioritise the brand and win business that may not otherwise exist.

Just as importantly, the work has made the remaining barriers more visible. What began as a reseller challenge has increasingly exposed wider questions of organisational alignment, sponsorship, authority and behaviour — even if that diagnosis is not yet fully accepted across the business.

That distinction matters because the route forward is clearer.

The foundation is stronger. The outlook is better. The work is not finished — and that does not diminish what has genuinely changed.

This is an anonymised case study on a channel transformation programme led by Tensor Helion's founder in an embedded commercial role. Details have been altered or generalised to protect confidentiality.