THE RESULT

"$8M in year one"? Our forecast is $3.0M. On that basis one option fits policy, if it can show results.

A VP Sales at an 11,500-person pump maker compares two distributors and a direct-hire plan for a new territory, with any AI chat his company allows.

THE RESULT What Marcus brings to the commercial review on January 14. Fictional company.

HALDEN INDUSTRIES · SALES · US SOUTH

Texas and Oklahoma: coverage from Q2

For: Mike Brennan, Chief Commercial Officer
From: Marcus Bell · January 14

THE RECOMMENDATION

Northgate Supply, on its 2-year non-exclusive terms, if before signing it shows a track record for its 45 Texas and Oklahoma accounts and confirms it carries no competing line. It is the only option that fits our channel policy as proposed. · Inputs 3, 6

COST AT OUR $3.0M YEAR-ONE FORECAST

Northgate	Kellan	Direct hires	Northgate's $8M Promise
$360K	$540K	$495K fixed	No basis given
12% commission; 45 accounts in territory	If forecast is at list price (about $659K if net); breaks policy on 3 points	About 9 months to full productivity	

WHAT I NEED YOU TO DECIDE

DECIDE	**Northgate, on two conditions** A track record for its 45 accounts in the territory, and no competing line (or your waiver). · Inputs 3, 6
DECIDE	**The fallback, today: if Northgate's references aren't in by January 29, direct hiring starts** Our 2025 hires took about 9 months to reach full productivity. Waiting longer pushes that further out. · Input 5
NOTE	**The costs show what each option costs to sell our forecast, not what each will sell** Nothing yet shows that any option will sell $3.0M. Sales Operations confirms whether the $3.0M is at list price or net before we decide; Kellan's cost depends on it. · Inputs 2, 4

CAUGHT ON REVIEW

1. "$8M in year one" is **a promise**; our own forecast is $3.0M
2. "120 accounts": **only 45 are in Texas or Oklahoma**
3. Kellan's terms **break policy three ways**: 5 years, exclusive, a competing line

UC-003 · SC-03 · REV B	
FOR **VP Sales, US South**	SECTOR **Industrial manufacturing**
COMPANY **11,500 people · 9 plants**	TASK **Choose how to cover a new sales territory**
WRITTEN FOR **ChatGPT · Claude · Gemini · Copilot**	
AI TEST **Claude, Nov 13, 2026 · 7 of 7 found**	

STEP 0 · THE MESS

What landed on Marcus's desk

A one-line request from the CCO, the company's own forecast, two distributor proposals priced in different ways, a note from HR and the channel policy. The proposals sound better than the forecast.

EMAIL · CCO [1]

Texas and Oklahoma

"We need coverage from Q2. You have three options on the table."

1 **Three options.**

SALES OPS FORECAST [2]

Year one

$3.0M base case (range $2.2M to $3.8M).

2 **Your basis.**

PROPOSAL · NORTHGATE [3]

Distributor

"We'll deliver $8M in year one." "120 active industrial accounts."

3 **Promise or evidence?**

PROPOSAL · KELLAN [4]

Distributor

18% off list. Also carries Brayford pumps. Requires a 5-year exclusive.

4 **Check the policy.**

NOTE · HR [5]

Direct hires

$165,000 loaded cost each. About 9 months to full productivity.

5 **When**

CHANNEL POLICY [6]

Extract

Initial terms limited to 2 years. Exclusivity needs board approval.

6 **The rules.**

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

72%

of manufacturing decision makers say channel partners drive significant market share, so choosing the right one matters.

Salesforce, Trends in Manufacturing research. Source

STEPS 1–3 · HOW IT WORKS

Three steps, one chat

Here the AI compares options that are priced differently. The prompt gives it your basis for comparing.

1 Open a new chat

Use the AI tool your company approves: ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini or Copilot.

2 Paste the prompt and the inputs

Copy the prompt and the six fictional inputs from the appendix into one message.

3 Recalculate one cost yourself

Work out one option's cost at your own forecast. Then ask what each option would have to sell to justify it.

THE PROMPT, PART BY PART

COPY-READY VERSION IN THE APPENDIX

I'm VP Sales for the US South at an industrial pump maker. We need sales coverage in Texas and Oklahoma from the second quarter, and our Chief Commercial Officer wants my recommendation at the commercial review on Thursday, January 14. Today is Tuesday, January 5. Below are his email, our sales forecast for the territory, two distributor proposals, the cost of hiring our own reps, and our channel policy.

1 Who you are, who decides, when, and today's date.

Please give me:

1. **A comparison table**: each option, what it costs at our own year-one forecast (the same basis for all three), what it offers, and what our policy says about it.
2. **Evidence or promise?** Which claims in the proposals are evidence and which are promises.
3. **What's missing** that I'd need before deciding.
4. **My recommendation**, with a one-line reason. If none fits as proposed, say so, and say what would make one fit.

2 A table on one basis, evidence or promise, what's missing, and a recommendation that can be "none fits as proposed".

Compare costs on our forecast, not the partners' claims. Keep evidence of results apart from cost. Check each option against the policy. Don't add facts that aren't in the inputs; if you assume something, say so.

3 The heavy lifting: cost on your forecast, not the partners' claims, keep evidence apart from cost, and check each option against policy. It found all seven problems.

WHERE TO PASTE

Every tool has one message box. Paste the prompt, add a blank line, paste the inputs, send. Proposals can be attached as files if your tool allows it.

SAFE TO TRY

Practise with the fictional inputs first. Real proposals and pricing are confidential: use only your company's approved tool.

THE AI'S FIRST ANSWER

What Claude actually wrote

Exactly as it came back, not edited. Read it the way Marcus did: check each point against the source it cites.

UNEDITED Claude · fresh session, no other context · Nov 13, 2026 · one run

Recommendation for Texas and Oklahoma coverage from Q2 Prepared for: Marcus (VP Sales, US South). For: Mike Brennan, commercial review, Thursday January 14.

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1. Comparison table (all costs at our own year-one forecast)

Basis: Sales Ops forecast of **$3.0M base case, range $2.2M to $3.8M** [2]. The partners' own sales claims are not used for cost.

Assumption (needs confirming): I have treated the $3.0M forecast as sales valued at list price. That way Northgate's "net sales" and Kellan's "off list price" can be put on the same base. If the forecast is actually Halden's net revenue, Kellan's cost goes up (see the note under the table).

	Northgate Supply [3]	Kellan Industrial [4]	Direct hires [5]
How we pay	12% commission on Halden net sales in the territory	Kellan buys at 18% off list and resells at list, so we give up 18% margin	3 reps × $165,000 loaded cost, a fixed cost
Year-one cost at $3.0M base	**$360,000** (12% × $3.0M)	**$540,000** (18% × $3.0M)	**$495,000** (3 × $165K) found
Cost at $2.2M low	$264,000	$396,000	$495,000 (22.5% of sales)
Cost at $3.8M high	$456,000	$684,000	$495,000 (13.0% of sales)
What it offers	45 accounts in TX/OK (of the 120 claimed; the other 75 are in Louisiana and New Mexico). 2-year, non-exclusive.	60 accounts, all stated to be in TX/OK.	Our own people and full control. But our 2025 hires took about 9 months to reach full productivity [5], so a Q2 start means full productivity around Q1 of the following year. found
What our policy says [6]	**Fits as proposed.** The 2-year term is within the limit and it is non-exclusive. Not stated: whether Northgate carries a competing line.	**Does not fit as proposed, on three points.** (a) The 5-year term breaks the 2-year limit. (b) Exclusivity needs board approval. (c) Kellan carries Brayford, a direct competitor, which needs a CCO waiver.	The distributor policy doesn't apply. No conflict. found

Note on Kellan: if the $3.0M forecast is Halden's net revenue rather than list-price sales, the equivalent list-price sales are $3.0M ÷ 0.82 = $3.66M. The margin we give up would then be about $659,000.

Break-even points (my arithmetic, from the inputs):

- Direct hires cost less than Northgate only if sales are above $4.125M ($495K ÷ 12%). That is above the top of our forecast range.
- Direct hires cost less than Kellan above $2.75M ($495K ÷ 18%), so at our base case direct is already cheaper than Kellan.
- Neither direct-hire figure allows for the 9-month ramp. If the forecast assumes full productivity from day one, direct hires would probably deliver less than $3.0M in year one. This is an assumption; the forecast doesn't say how it treats ramp-up.

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2. Evidence or promise?

These are kept apart from the cost figures above.

Claim	Source	Evidence or promise?
"We'll deliver $8M in year one"	Northgate [3]	**Promise.** No basis is given. It is 2.7 times our base case and more than twice the top of our range. It should not be used in any cost or revenue figure. found
"120 active industrial accounts"	Northgate [3]	**Partly evidence, but overstated for our purpose.** The attached list shows only **45 in TX/OK**. The other 75 are outside the territory. "Active" isn't defined, and nothing shows what these accounts buy.
"60 accounts, all in Texas and Oklahoma"	Kellan [4]	**Claim, not evidenced.** No account list is mentioned. Unverified.

Claim	Source	Evidence or promise?
Kellan carries Brayford pumps	Kellan [4]	**Disclosed fact.** It counts against Kellan under our policy.
$3.0M forecast (range $2.2M to $3.8M)	Sales Ops [2]	**Our own estimate,** based on 2026 quote requests. It is evidence of demand, not of what any partner will sell.
About 9 months to full productivity	HR [5]	**Evidence** from Halden's own 2025 hires.

Neither distributor gives any evidence of past sales results: no sales history, references or comparable lines. `found`

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3. What's missing before deciding `C: three that decide it`

Both distributors

- Past sales results in TX/OK, ideally for a comparable industrial pump line, plus customer references.
- How much their accounts overlap with customers Halden already sells to or quotes in the territory.
- How quickly they can be selling for us by the start of Q2, and what technical support, stocking and service they provide.

Northgate

- Whether it carries any line that competes with Halden. The proposal doesn't say, and the policy requires a CCO waiver if it does.
- What "net sales" means for the commission.
- Whether commission would apply to sales into Louisiana or New Mexico, since 75 of its accounts are there.
- What "active" means for the 45 TX/OK accounts.

Kellan

- The actual account list.
- How much of its pump business is Brayford, and whether it would prioritise Halden.
- Whether it would accept a 2-year, non-exclusive term.

Direct hires

- How long it takes to recruit three reps. Starting January 5, they may not be in seat for Q2.
- Whether the $165,000 loaded cost includes travel and expenses.
- Whether the $3.0M forecast already allows for the 9-month ramp.

Our own forecast

- Whether $3.0M is at list price or at Halden net. This changes Kellan's cost by about $119,000.

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4. Recommendation

Go with Northgate, on its proposed 2-year, non-exclusive terms, subject to conditions confirmed before signing. Reason: it is the only option that fits our channel policy as proposed, and it is the cheapest at every point of our own forecast ($264K to $456K, against $396K to $684K for Kellan and a fixed $495K for direct hires). `A: cost to sell, not sales`

Before signing, Northgate needs to:

1. Confirm in writing that it carries no directly competing line, or get a CCO waiver.
2. Show sales history and references for its 45 TX/OK accounts. Plan on 45 accounts, not 120.
3. Agree that commission is 12% of Halden net sales in TX/OK only, with net sales defined.
4. Accept a review against our own $3.0M forecast, not its $8M promise. A 6-month checkpoint is my suggestion, not something in the inputs.

If Northgate can't show any credible results in the territory, none of the options fits as proposed. In that case I'd bring Mike a choice between direct hires (fits policy, $495K fixed, about 9-month ramp, cheaper than Kellan at base case) and a reworked Kellan deal. `B: decide the fallback now`

Kellan does not fit as proposed. It could only fit if:

- the term is cut to 2 years, because policy limits initial terms to 2 years;
- it drops exclusivity, or the board approves it;
- the CCO grants a waiver for Brayford.

Even then, it is the most expensive option at our forecast.

Direct hires make sense only if we expect sales above about $4.1M, which is above our range, or if control of the territory matters more than cost. Because of the 9-month ramp, they are unlikely to give full coverage from Q2.

`found` caught a planted problem `A–C` Marcus changes it; see the next section

THE HUMAN PART

What Marcus changed, and why

Claude found every planted problem and kept the partner's promise out of the numbers. Marcus's edits are about what the cost table proves, timing, and what the CCO needs.

WHAT CLAUDE FOUND: 7 OF 7 PLANTED PROBLEMS

One run

- ✓ "$8M" is a promise
- ✓ Only 45 of 120 accounts in territory
- ✓ Three cost bases on one forecast
- ✓ Kellan carries a competing line
- ✓ 5-year exclusive breaks policy
- ✓ Direct reps take 9 months
- ✓ No track record from either

THREE EDITS, ONE CATCH AND TWO JUDGMENT CALLS

	CLAUDE WROTE	MARCUS'S VERSION	WHY · ACCURACY
A	"It is the cheapest at every point of our own forecast ($264K to $456K ...)."	**The costs show what each option costs to sell our forecast. Nothing yet shows that Northgate's 45 accounts will sell $3.0M, so the track record is a condition, not a detail.**	Cheapest at the same sales isn't the same as best. The table assumes every option sells $3.0M, and that is the thing nobody has shown.

	CLAUDE WROTE	MARCUS'S VERSION	WHY · DECISION
B	"If Northgate can't show any credible results ... I'd bring Mike a choice between direct hires ... and a reworked Kellan deal."	**Mike decides the fallback on the 14th: if Northgate's references aren't in by January 29, direct hiring starts.**	Direct reps take about 9 months to reach full productivity. Coming back weeks later for a second decision pushes coverage further out.

	CLAUDE WROTE	MARCUS'S VERSION	WHY · LENGTH
C	A 13-point list of what's missing, across four headings.	**The CCO's page shows the two conditions that decide it. The rest goes to the deal team as the checklist before signing.**	The CCO is deciding whether to go ahead. The deal team needs the full list.

What only you can do Say what the numbers do and don't prove, settle the fallback while there's still time, and give the CCO only what he has to decide. The AI put the options on one basis. You make the call.

YOUR TURN

Make it yours

Use it whenever you're choosing between options that are priced differently: partners, suppliers, agencies, outsourcing or hiring.

YOUR PROMPT: FILL IN THE BRACKETS

I'm the **[your role]** at a **[industry]** company. We need **[what]** by **[when]**, and **[who]** wants my recommendation on **[date]**. Today is **[date]**. Below are **[the request, our own forecast, each proposal, the in-house option and our policy]**.

Please give me: **1. A comparison table**: each option, what it costs at our own forecast (the same basis for all), what it offers, and what our policy says about it. **2. Evidence or promise?** Which claims in the proposals are evidence and which are promises. **3. What's missing** that I'd need before deciding. **4. My recommendation**, with a one-line reason. If none fits as proposed, say so, and say what would make one fit.

Compare costs on our forecast, not the proposals' claims. Keep evidence of results apart from cost. Check each option against the policy. Don't add facts that aren't in the inputs; if you assume something, say so.

FIVE CHECKS BEFORE YOU SEND

1. Every option is costed on your own forecast.
2. Promises are labelled as promises and kept out of the numbers.
3. Counts (accounts, customers, sites) are checked for what's actually in scope.
4. Each option is tested against your policy, with who can waive what.
5. The fallback is decided now if waiting would cost time you can't get back.

MAKE IT REPEATABLE (OPTIONAL)

Save the prompt once and reuse it for every partner or supplier choice: a custom GPT in ChatGPT, a project in Claude, a Gem in Gemini, or an agent in Copilot. Some companies switch these off; copy and paste always works.

WITH REAL DATA

Proposals, pricing and forecasts are confidential. Use only the AI tool your company approves, and follow its rules.

WHAT THIS EXAMPLE SHOWS

One run of this prompt in Claude found all seven problems planted in fictional inputs and costed all three options on one basis.

WHAT IT DOESN'T SHOW

That every tool, setting or run will do the same, how much time it saves you, or which option would sell more in a real territory. Halden Industries, the distributors and their people are fictional.

APPENDIX

Copy-ready: the prompt and the six inputs

Copy the prompt, then all six inputs, into one message in a new chat. Everything here is fictional and safe to paste.

THE PROMPT

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Compare costs on our forecast, not the partners' claims. Keep evidence of results apart from cost. Check each option against the policy. Don't add facts that aren't in the inputs; if you assume something, say so.

[1] EMAIL FROM MIKE BRENNAN, CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER

Marcus, we need coverage in Texas and Oklahoma from Q2. You have three options on the table. Bring me a recommendation for the commercial review on the 14th.

[2] SALES OPERATIONS: TERRITORY FORECAST

Year-one Halden sales in Texas and Oklahoma: $3.0M base case (range $2.2M to $3.8M), based on 2026 quote requests from the territory.

[3] PROPOSAL FROM NORTHGATE SUPPLY

Commission: 12% of Halden's net sales in the territory. "We'll deliver $8M in year one." "120 active industrial accounts" (account list attached: 45 in Texas or Oklahoma, the rest in Louisiana and New Mexico). Term: 2 years, non-exclusive.

[4] PROPOSAL FROM KELLAN INDUSTRIAL

Kellan buys from Halden at 18% off list price and resells at list. 60 accounts, all in Texas and Oklahoma. Kellan also carries Brayford pumps. Requires a 5-year exclusive agreement.

[5] NOTE FROM HR: DIRECT HIRES

Three territory sales reps at $165,000 loaded cost each per year. Halden's 2025 hires took about 9 months to reach full productivity.

[6] HALDEN CHANNEL POLICY (EXTRACT)

Initial distributor terms are limited to 2 years. Exclusivity needs board approval. A partner may not carry a directly competing line in the same product category without a CCO waiver. Brayford pumps compete directly with Halden in this category.