

# The Co-Sell Playbook: How to Get AWS Field Reps Selling Your Product

Listing on AWS Marketplace gets you on the shelf. Co-sell is what gets you off it. When AWS's own field sales team starts recommending your product to their enterprise accounts, your sales motion changes entirely — you show up in meetings with an implicit AWS endorsement, deals close faster, and you're accessing relationships that would take years to build on your own. This guide is the practical playbook for activating and building an AWS co-sell motion from scratch.

**5,000+**

AWS field reps globally  
working enterprise accounts

**2.5×**

more co-sell opportunities  
reported by ISV Accelerate  
participants

**40%**

faster average deal closure  
for co-sell opportunities vs.  
direct

## What Co-Sell Actually Is (and What It Isn't)

Co-sell means AWS and a software vendor work together on a specific deal. In practice, it means an AWS field rep — an Account Manager (AM), Partner Development Manager (PDM), or Solutions Architect (SA) — actively involves your product in a sales conversation they're having with one of their enterprise customers.

It is worth being precise about what co-sell is *not*, because founders often confuse it with other things:

- **Not discoverability.** Your product appearing in AWS Marketplace search results is not co-sell.
- **Not marketing.** AWS promoting your listing in an email campaign or on their partner website is not co-sell.
- **Not inbound.** A customer finding you through Marketplace and buying without AWS rep involvement is a great outcome, but it is not co-sell.

Co-sell is a human sales motion. An AWS rep decides that your product is relevant to a customer problem, and takes an action — introducing you, registering an opportunity in Partner Central, or including your product in a larger solution recommendation. That human decision and action is the thing you are trying to cultivate.

**Why this distinction matters:** Many SaaS companies list on AWS Marketplace and then wonder why no deals are coming through. The answer is almost always that they treated the listing as the finish line rather than the starting gun. The listing enables co-sell — it does not produce it automatically.

## Why AWS Reps Want to Co-Sell With You

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Understanding the incentive structure is essential. AWS reps are not doing you a favor when they co-sell — they have concrete reasons to do it. If you can align your product to those reasons, you become a tool reps actively reach for.

### 1. Their customers have AWS spend to burn

Most enterprise AWS customers have committed to spending a certain amount with AWS each year — this is the Enterprise Discount Program (EDP). Purchases through AWS Marketplace count toward that commitment. An AWS rep whose customer is behind on their EDP burn wants to find Marketplace products that solve real problems. You are not an interruption; you are a solution to their quarterly target problem.

### 2. You help their customers succeed on AWS

AWS reps are measured heavily on customer success metrics — health scores, workload expansion, renewal rates. If your SaaS product helps a customer get more value from

their AWS environment (better security, better data pipelines, better observability), recommending you makes the rep look good and helps their account metrics. This is especially true for products that are deeply integrated with AWS services like S3, Redshift, CloudWatch, or Security Hub.

### 3. You help AWS win against Azure and GCP

AWS reps are actively competing with Microsoft and Google for workloads. A strong ISV partner ecosystem is one of AWS's competitive advantages. If your product helps a customer do something AWS does better than Azure — or helps a customer migrate from Azure to AWS — that rep will co-sell you aggressively.

**The positioning implication:** Don't just describe what your product does — frame it in AWS terms. Which AWS services does it integrate with? What customer problem does it solve that an AWS rep's enterprise account would recognize? A rep needs to be able to drop your value proposition into a customer conversation in two sentences.

## The AWS Partner Program: Where Co-Sell Lives

Formal co-sell access runs through the AWS Partner Network (APN). For SaaS companies, the most relevant path is the **ISV Accelerate program** — a co-sell program specifically designed for Independent Software Vendors with AWS Marketplace listings. Here is how the tiers work:

| APN TIER          | KEY REQUIREMENTS                                                | CO-SELL ACCESS                                                  |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Registered</b> | Free to join, no minimums                                       | No formal co-sell; Partner Central access is limited            |
| <b>Select</b>     | \$3K+ in AWS revenue/consumption, 2 certifications              | Partner Central access, can log opportunities, some PDM support |
| <b>Advanced</b>   | Higher revenue, more certifications, customer satisfaction data | Dedicated PDM, active co-sell referrals, joint marketing funds  |
| <b>Premier</b>    | Top-tier ISVs with significant AWS revenue                      | Strategic co-sell, executive engagement, custom programs        |

For early-stage SaaS companies, the standard APN tier progression can feel like a chicken-and-egg problem: you need co-sell revenue to climb the tiers, but you need the tiers to get co-sell. ISV Accelerate exists to break this cycle.

## ISV Accelerate: The Co-Sell On-Ramp for SaaS Companies

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AWS ISV Accelerate is the program you should be targeting. It is purpose-built for SaaS vendors who are listed (or actively getting listed) on AWS Marketplace and want access to AWS co-sell support before they've built a large revenue history with AWS.

### What you need to qualify

- An active AWS Marketplace listing (or be in the process — you can apply before your listing is live)
- APN membership at the Registered tier or above (free to join at [aws.amazon.com/partners](https://aws.amazon.com/partners))
- A product that runs on, integrates with, or is deployed on AWS — or a SaaS product whose customers use AWS
- Commitment to co-sell SLAs: respond to referrals in Partner Central within 5 business days

### What ISV Accelerate gives you

- **Partner Central access** — the system where you submit co-sell opportunities and receive inbound referrals from AWS reps
- **A Partner Development Manager (PDM)** — your primary AWS relationship, shared or dedicated depending on tier
- **Joint marketing support** — AWS co-marketing assets and messaging guidance
- **Co-sell visibility** — your product becomes visible to AWS account teams as a co-sell partner, not just a listed vendor

**ISV Accelerate in practice:** ISV Accelerate participants consistently report 2–3x more co-sell opportunities than non-participants, and co-sell sourced deals have higher win rates.

The program is not magic — you still have to work it — but it opens the door that was previously closed to early-stage companies.

## The Co-Sell Motion: What It Looks Like When It's Working

Here is a concrete example of a co-sell motion from introduction to close, so you have a mental model of what you are building toward:

### Phase 1 — Warm Introduction

An AWS Account Manager is working with a fintech company that's running on AWS and struggling with data observability. The AM knows your log analytics product from a partner brief your PDM shared. They send a short email introduction: "I work with a team I think could use your product — they're on AWS and have a specific problem you're built for. Mind if I connect you?" You reply within the same day. A 30-minute discovery call is scheduled for the following week.

### Phase 2 — Joint Sales Engagement

You run the discovery and demo with your standard playbook. The AWS AM is not present on every call — they've opened the door and trust you to close it. But when the prospect asks "Do you work well with AWS?", the implied answer is yes: an AWS rep just introduced you. That endorsement is worth more than any case study you could put in a deck.

### Phase 3 — Deal Registration and Closure

You log the deal in Partner Central as a co-sell opportunity, tagging the account team. This gives the AM credit for the introduction and keeps them engaged and motivated to support the deal. The deal closes through a Private Offer on

Marketplace — the customer uses their committed AWS spend, the procurement process is compressed, and both sides win.

### **Phase 4 — Track Record Compounds**

You report the win in Partner Central. The AM gets a co-sell success on their record. You've now demonstrated that when an AWS rep introduces you, you close — which is exactly what makes reps want to introduce you again. The first co-sell win is the hardest; each subsequent one comes faster because your reputation within the AWS account team network builds on itself.

## **Building Your Co-Sell Pipeline: The First 90 Days**

Most ISV partners join Partner Central, set up their profile, and wait for referrals. They are disappointed. The founders who build real co-sell pipelines take a more active approach — especially in the first 90 days when you have no track record yet.

### **1. Make your PDM your most important sales relationship**

Your Partner Development Manager is the highest-leverage relationship in your AWS ecosystem. They have conversations with dozens of account teams every week. If they know your product, your ICP, and your best customer story, they will mention you. If they barely know you exist, they won't. Schedule a standing bi-weekly call. Bring a clear agenda. Share your top 10 target accounts. Brief them on any new customer wins. Treat this like you would a top sales hire.

### **2. Map your target accounts to AWS account teams**

You almost certainly already know the 10 to 20 enterprise companies you most want to close in the next 12 months. AWS has account teams covering those exact companies. Through your PDM, request introductions to the Account Managers and Solutions Architects for your highest-priority targets. This proactive targeting — rather than waiting for inbound referrals — is the fastest path to your first co-sell deals.

### **3. Create a one-page AWS partner brief**

AWS reps are busy. They will not read your website or your pitch deck. Create a single-page document that answers: What does your product do? Which AWS services does it integrate with? What problem does it solve for an enterprise AWS customer? What does your best customer look like? This brief becomes your PDM's leave-behind when they mention you to account teams.

#### 4. Log your own deals in Partner Central

Don't just wait for inbound referrals from AWS. When you are already talking to a prospect who is on AWS, log that opportunity in Partner Central proactively and tag the relevant account team. This puts your deal in front of the AWS rep — who may be able to validate it with their customer contact, accelerate the procurement path, or at minimum get credit for the deal. Logging your own opportunities is the fastest way to build a co-sell track record.

#### 5. Build at least two referenceable AWS customer stories

Nothing unlocks co-sell referrals faster than a proven win with a mutual customer type. An AWS rep who can say to their customer "I know a company just like yours that reduced X by Y% using this tool on AWS" has a concrete reason to make an introduction. Develop two or three crisp, quantified customer stories specifically framed in AWS terms — not generic case studies, but stories that make an AWS rep feel confident making the introduction.

## Common Co-Sell Mistakes That Kill Momentum

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**Mistake 1: Positioning your product as competition for AWS native services.** If your product does something AWS already does natively — basic monitoring, simple log storage, standard alerting — AWS reps will not co-sell you. They protect their own services revenue. Frame yourself as complementary: your product extends AWS services, makes them more powerful, or adds capabilities that AWS does not offer. "Better than CloudWatch" is a pitch for AWS to fire you as a partner. "We make CloudWatch more actionable" is a pitch for co-sell.

**Mistake 2: Missing co-sell SLAs.** When an AWS rep sends you a referral through Partner Central, they expect a response within 5 business days. Founders who consistently miss this window get quietly deprioritized in how referrals are routed. Treat every Partner Central notification like a hot inbound lead — because it is. Set up Slack or email alerts for Partner Central notifications and assign a specific person to own response time.

**Mistake 3: Waiting for the relationship to build itself.** AWS has over 100,000 registered partners. Your PDM manages dozens of ISVs. If you are not proactively communicating, bringing deals to the table, and keeping your partner profile fresh, you are invisible. The SaaS companies that build thriving co-sell channels treat the AWS relationship like an active sales engagement — regular touchpoints, clear asks, and consistent follow-up.

## Realistic Timeline: When Will Co-Sell Produce Real Pipeline?

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Co-sell is a 12-month investment, not a 30-day switch. Here is an honest timeline for an early-stage SaaS company starting from scratch:

|            |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Month 1–2  | Get listed on AWS Marketplace, join ISV Accelerate, get assigned a PDM. Focus on relationship-building, not referral volume.                                                                                 |
| Month 3–4  | Build relationship with PDM, create partner brief, get introductions to 3–5 AWS account teams, start logging your own deals in Partner Central.                                                              |
| Month 5–6  | First warm inbound referrals arrive (typically 1–3 per month at this stage). First co-sell deals enter your pipeline.                                                                                        |
| Month 9–12 | First co-sell deals close. Track record starts compounding. Referral volume increases as more account teams know you and trust your close rate.                                                              |
| Year 2+    | Co-sell becomes a meaningful percentage of your pipeline. Longer-term, the strongest co-sell partners have AWS reps actively looking for opportunities to introduce them — rather than the other way around. |

**Rule of thumb from founders who've built it:** Invest at least one focused day per week on your AWS relationship in the first six months. That means PDM calls, target account outreach, opportunity logging, and keeping your Partner Central profile current. It is a real commitment — but the compounding leverage of an active co-sell channel makes the math work decisively in your favor over time.

## What Separates the Co-Sell Winners

After watching dozens of SaaS companies approach co-sell, the pattern is consistent. The companies that build a real co-sell channel share three traits:

**They treat co-sell as a pipeline channel, not a program to join.** They assign someone — often the founder at early stage — to own the AWS relationship with the same rigor as any other sales channel. Weekly activity, clear metrics, regular PDM calls.

**They bring deals to the table, not just their hand out.** They log their own opportunities. They proactively identify target accounts and ask for introductions rather than waiting for the phone to ring. The co-sell relationship is reciprocal — AWS reps refer more to partners who also bring them deals.

**They make it easy for AWS reps to sell them.** One-page partner brief. Clear ICP. Quantified customer stories. Fast response to referrals. When an AWS rep introduces them, deals close and the experience is smooth. Reps remember that, and they make more introductions.

### Key Takeaways

- Co-sell is the highest-leverage activity in cloud GTM — it gives you AWS's global sales force as an unofficial channel partner. Listing on Marketplace enables it; it does not produce it automatically.
- AWS ISV Accelerate is the right program for early-stage SaaS companies: apply once you have an active Marketplace listing and you are ready to commit to co-sell SLAs and active relationship-building.

- Your Partner Development Manager is your most important AWS relationship. Invest in that relationship like you would a top sales hire — regular calls, clear briefings, and consistent follow-up.
- Log your own deals in Partner Central proactively. Bringing opportunities to AWS account teams — rather than waiting for inbound referrals — is the fastest path to your first co-sell wins.
- Plan for a 6–12 month ramp. Co-sell compounds over time as your track record builds and more AWS account teams know and trust your product. The founders who stay the course are the ones who end up with a channel that scales.

### **Ready to explore AWS Marketplace as a revenue channel?**

Straightline helps early-stage SaaS companies get listed on AWS Marketplace, manage their co-sell pipeline, and build a cloud GTM strategy that actually moves deals. Get started at [usestraightline.com](https://usestraightline.com).