



Microsoft Customer Solution Customer Solution Case Study



Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: High tech and electronics

Customer Profile

AOpen Center is a system builder that provides computer hardware and software solutions and technical consultation to resellers and other small and midsize businesses in the eastern United States.

Business Situation

AOpen Center competes against original equipment manufacturers, large retailers, and resellers in its size range. Many of its customers do not understand the need to ensure that they are running properly licensed software.

Solution

The Microsoft® Windows® Genuine Advantage program gives AOpen Center and its customers the tools and services to help them understand the value of running genuine Microsoft software.

Benefits

- Satisfied customers
- Increased revenue
- Support savings
- Competitive advantage

System Builder Gains Competitive Edge with Genuine Software and Validation Tool

“With Windows Genuine Advantage, we have a way to demonstrate to customers our commitment to using 100 percent genuine Microsoft software.”

Jeff DiBella, Vice President of Sales, AOpen Center

AOpen Center, a system builder based in Gaithersburg, Maryland, provides computer solutions and components to resellers and other small and midsize businesses in the eastern United States. As a Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner and with 2004 sales of U.S.\$10 million, the company is a recognized leader in the manufacturing of unbranded desktop and portable computers and the distribution of components. To maintain its leadership position and provide its customers the best possible computing experience, AOpen Center offers genuine Microsoft Windows® operating system software. With the help of a new program dedicated to helping customers understand the advantages of using genuine Microsoft software, AOpen Center is more easily communicating those advantages—to the benefit of itself and its customers alike.



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Jeff DiBella, Vice President of Sales,
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Situation

Like many other system builders in the eastern United States, Maryland-based AOpen Center focuses its business on system integrators, value-added resellers, and retail dealers, along with small to midsize enterprises of all types. For these firms, AOpen Center builds and sells unbranded desktop and portable computers and distributes computer components. The company also licenses Microsoft® Windows® operating systems, Microsoft Office, and a limited selection of desktop tools from other vendors.

AOpen Center faces competition on two fronts. On one front are a handful of global original equipment manufacturers that sell directly to customers, and major retailers that can sometimes offer lower prices because of their high sales volume. On the other front are hundreds of resellers closer in size to AOpen Center. To meet these competitive challenges, AOpen Center maintains close control over the design and manufacturing of its products and the components it sells, and emphasizes the excellent service and support it offers customers through highly knowledgeable and experienced sales and service personnel.

Through these individuals, AOpen Center can establish a more direct, person-to-person relationship with customers than they might find with the larger competitors of AOpen Center. Through such relationships, AOpen Center can more effectively communicate its message regarding one of the characteristics that differentiates it from some of the resellers in its size range: AOpen Center's commitment to using only genuine Microsoft Windows software.

Explaining the value of running genuine, properly licensed software is not always easy, says Jeff DiBella, Vice President of Sales for AOpen Center. “For example, many custom-

ers do not fully understand that a copy of the Microsoft Windows operating system that is transferred from one computer to another is not considered ‘genuine’ on the second computer,” he says. “This practice has become more appealing as hardware prices have declined, making the price of the software in a hardware/software package more significant by comparison. It is especially appealing to customers who already have Windows running on a desktop computer and are considering the purchase of a portable computer.”

To avoid losing such customers, AOpen Center has, in the past, sold them hardware without an operating system. Quite frequently, however, a customer will have trouble installing the nongenuine operating system on the new hardware and will call for assistance, consuming valuable AOpen Center support resources. A similar, but even more serious, problem occurs when a customer attempts to use counterfeit software.

“Unfortunately, there are quite a few system builders and resellers out there offering software that cannot be validated,” DiBella explains. “The customer who unwittingly purchases such software faces reliability and security problems with the code itself, a lack of access to vital technical help and documentation, and an uncertain future with regard to non-security-related upgrades.”

When such customers try to run the software on AOpen Center hardware, both parties lose. “Even if a customer manages to install counterfeit software successfully, they often wind up calling us for support since counterfeit software is more vulnerable to spyware and viruses—and those calls are the kind that takes up a lot of our support team's time,” DiBella says. “At some point, the customer will usually give up and agree to license the genuine software from us, but by that time they are way behind in getting their new system up and running.”

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Whether customers encounter problems from trying to transfer “good” software from their old computers or to run “bad” software that they have unwittingly acquired from a counterfeiter, the result is the same: a less-than-satisfactory experience with a system they purchased from AOpen Center. “This can put us in a negative light even though the problems might have nothing to do with our hardware,” DiBella notes.

Solution

Fortunately, such scenarios are becoming a thing of the past at AOpen Center. This is thanks to the new Microsoft Windows Genuine Advantage program. “With Windows Genuine Advantage, we have a way to demonstrate to customers our commitment to using 100 percent genuine Microsoft software, and to demonstrate the benefits they gain by using 100 percent genuine Microsoft software,” DiBella reports.

For instance, the Windows Genuine Advantage program offers a validation tool so that customers can determine whether their system is running genuine Microsoft Windows XP or Windows 2000 operating system software. “We just tell the customer to ask the system vendor about the validation tool,” DiBella says. “If the vendor isn’t familiar with the tool or tells the customer that validation isn’t necessary, then the customer knows to come back to us because we guarantee the software that comes on our hardware is genuine. And the customer can confirm this by accessing the validation tool themselves.”

Benefits

The Windows Genuine Advantage program is playing a significant role in helping DiBella and his colleagues to convince customers of the value of running genuine Microsoft software. Besides enabling DiBella to help customers determine whether a given installation is genuine, the program provides customers with exclusive updates,

downloads, and training. The results are happier customers, greater revenue for AOpen Center, time saved for AOpen Center support staff, and an additional competitive edge.

“Really Made Our Case”

DiBella says the Windows Genuine Advantage validation tool was vital in helping one customer to understand that transferring software from one computer to another was not the thing to do. “The customer wanted to copy Microsoft Windows XP from a desktop computer to a new portable computer they were purchasing from us,” he says. “We tried to explain that the license was nontransferable, but it was the Windows Genuine Advantage program’s validation tool that really made our case. The customer went ahead and licensed a new copy of Windows XP for running on the new portable computer, and they have been very happy with the results.”

More Revenue, Better Use of Support Resources

AOpen Center is happy with the results, as well. “This customer won’t be calling our support team with problems resulting from attempts to use nongenuine software,” DiBella points out. “This leaves our support team more time for lucrative, value-added tasks such as helping with configuration and assembly or providing support on legitimate issues for users of genuine software.”

At AOpen Center, more than just the support team comes out on top. “By having an easy way to demonstrate the value of running genuine Microsoft Windows, we earn revenue licensing that software,” DiBella explains. “We save customers time and headaches. We also can introduce them to the other advantages of the Windows Genuine Advantage program, including fast access to upgrades, add-ins, and powerful software utilities and tools especially designed for

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www.aopencenter.com

small businesses. These include a new anti-spyware program available only through the Windows Genuine Advantage program.”

Leveling the Playing Field

Perhaps the biggest gain for AOpen Center, however, is having a program that helps to show customers why they should do business with a system builder that uses genuine Microsoft software. “With the Windows Genuine Advantage program, we now have a tool that levels the playing field against unethical resellers,” DiBella says. “It helps us to bring in more revenue. It helps our customers to run their businesses with greater reliability and security. It’s an absolutely huge deal for us.”

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Software and Services

- Microsoft Windows XP Professional
- Microsoft Windows 2000 Professional

■ Services

- Microsoft Windows Genuine Advantage program

Microsoft