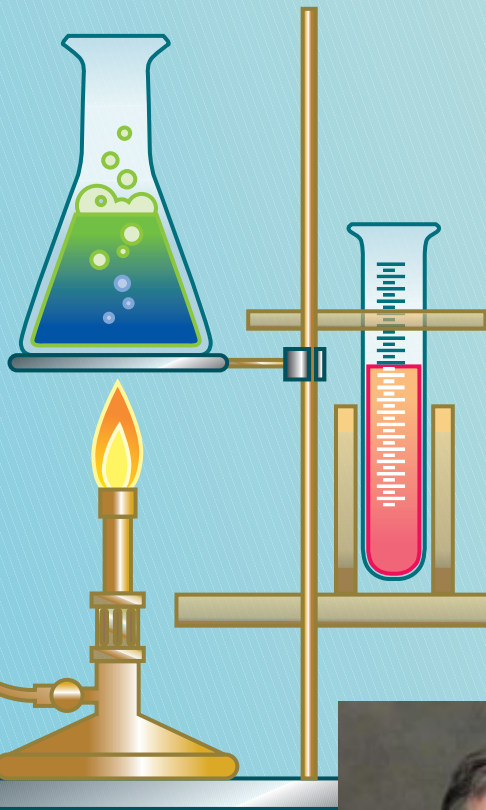

Manufacturer Seeks The Right Ingredients



Years ago, those of us fortunate enough to have experienced high school chemistry learned that a desired reaction will never take place unless the correct ingredients are assembled and combined. Well, that truth of chemistry is just as valid in the business world as it is in the world of science. The desired relationship between rep and manufacturer will never develop unless the correct ingredients are included from the outset.



Scott Pitney

Owing partly to the fact that he has worked closely with reps for more than a decade, Scott Pitney works long and hard at finding reps and then fine-tuning his relationships with them.

Pitney is president of Katy Spring & Manufacturing, Inc., Katy, Texas. The five-year-old company manufactures and sells — with the assistance of independent manufacturers' representatives — compression, extension, torsion and flat springs, along with other metal components that are available in a variety of shapes, sizes and material types.

Pitney had six years under his belt as the sales manager for a spring company when he made the move to open his own company more than five years ago. One of the first things he did was set about establishing a network of reps who would assist him in putting his products in the hands of customers. "It only makes economic sense for a start-up company

to go to market with reps,” he explains. “In addition, since we sell springs all over the world, it only makes sense that a rep in Seattle can make a sales call easier than we could from Texas. And, if the customer needs follow-up service, who better to provide it in an efficient and economical manner than the rep?”

Pitney began his search for reps by scouring ads found in the pages of *Agency Sales* magazine. After interviewing likely candidates on the phone, personal interviews were scheduled and he ultimately made his choices to cover the country.

Manufacturer Seeks Improved Relations

In another article in this issue of *Agency Sales*, we ask reps to evaluate their relationships with manufacturers. At the same time we asked Pitney for his thoughts on the principal-rep relationship, specifically, how it could be improved. Pitney voiced the same satisfaction with his principals as the reps in the other article did. As he mentioned earlier, the economics and geographic reach of the reps are huge points in their favor. According to the manufacturer, however, there are a few areas he feels the relationships, in general, could be enhanced.

“For instance,” he offers, “going into the relationship, I wish more reps had a knowledge of how our business works from the moment an inquiry comes across our desk. When I refer to knowing about our business, I think the rep ought to know how we operate from head to toe. If that willingness to learn about our operation is present — and that’s something we’re more than happy to help the rep with — it can only benefit both sides.”

As an example of how that knowledge can enhance the relationship, he says, “I’ve found that many times reps will want to hit a home run right out of the box. If they’ve taken the time to learn about how we operate, they’ll go about their business in a different manner. Here’s an example: We put one rep on and from the start I let him know that we don’t get into the ‘dirt-cheap’ commercial-type springs. Almost immediately, he calls me with an order from a garage-door-opener company. I know that order looked attractive to him, but if he had taken the time to learn about us and hear what we were telling him, he wouldn’t have been drawn to an order we had no interest in. His reaction to my criticism wasn’t positive, and that was the end of our relationship.”

Beginning With the Plant Tour

That understanding of how the manufacturer operates is enhanced, Pitney believes, by realizing the importance of starting off the relationship with a visit to the manufacturer’s facility. “The plant tour sets the foundation for the rep’s knowledge of our product line and of how we operate. That knowledge can only be established by the rep coming to us, not the other way around. The message we communicate to our reps during these plant visits is that we believe in the business, we believe in the contribution our reps make, and we’re committed to supporting them in the territory. Once they are exposed to our facility, see firsthand how we work and hear our presentation, it all comes together to establish a level of credibility that they can communicate to their customers. When the reps are out there in front of their customers making product presentations, they’ll be called upon to answer questions. They’ll be judged by their answers to those questions and the answers can’t be ‘I don’t know,’ or ‘I’ll have to check with the factory.’ The confidence and credibility they need to answer questions properly develops in the very beginning of our working relationship.”

Another area Pitney and Katy Spring focus on at the beginning of the rep-principal relationship is that of the reps looking to cover their expenses before they’ve done any selling for the company. “I’m very well aware of the expense involved in repping. But the first thing I’m interested in when we begin with a rep is that our line provides a good fit with the other lines he or she carries. Selling springs alone isn’t going to buy the rep that nice retirement home. What our line does is complement the other work they do.”

This belief has developed, he explains, based “not only on my years as a manufacturer working with reps, but also on my own time working as a rep. I know we’re all human and sometimes we’re driven by money. But reps have to keep in mind that there isn’t always immediate satisfaction for what they do. I’ve experienced some reps who fail to hit that home run right out of the box, and then they move on to something else. My experience has shown me that the rep needs to invest time and effort in his or her relationships with principals — as much as two to two-and-a-half years — before the benefits will really develop. Once you put in the time and effort, you begin to realize the residual benefits for the long run.”

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