
Indianapolis Chapter Keeps Members Involved

An advocate or a champion is what is needed for any good idea to truly get off the ground. That's exactly what MANA has in the presence and continued operation of its Indianapolis local networking chapter.

Conversations with two Indianapolis MANA members who are active on the chapter's steering committee point out the benefits of a chapter as well as what attributes a chapter needs in order to succeed.

For starters, get Roger Diamond, Technology Sales & Marketing, LLC, talking about the attributes of not only having a local chapter but participating in it. Then you'll understand what we're writing about.

According to Diamond, "I was somewhat involved in MANA up

until a couple of years ago when I traveled to Cincinnati to visit George Hayward, United Sales Associates. I had previously met him at a MANA seminar and I was seeking some advice on the basics of running an agency. He really provided me with a lot of valuable input. When I asked him what I could give him in return for his advice, his response was, 'Pass on whatever I've told you. Communicate with other reps and work with them.'"

Getting a Running Start

The first steps taken toward getting a local group started came about in the form of a lunch meeting with seven reps in attendance. "That was the beginning, and we've been up and running ever since," notes Diamond.

Sharing Common Concerns

Diamond describes some of the

impetus he feels other reps felt for their participation in the Indianapolis group. "Let's face it; one of the things all reps — especially the one- to three-man agencies — experience is a feeling of loneliness. There's the overall feeling that we're in this all by ourselves and no one experiences what we do but us. Then there are the other common concerns such as finding good principals, health insurance, commission laws, and how to effectively communicate with principals and customers. We learned in a hurry that a local networking chapter was the ideal solution to these problems."

After putting a local steering committee together, the group invited MANA's Manager of Membership Jerry Leth to its first meeting, which was attended by about 30 people. That initial meeting served as a springboard to additional meetings.

From those rather modest beginnings, the chapter has continued meeting regularly and can now boast that its attendance has



Roger Diamond

grown for seven consecutive meetings, with the latest having more than 60 reps in attendance.

Bill Bissmeyer, B&B Air, Inc., points to three primary reasons why the chapter has continued growing:

- “The first thing we’ve done,” he explains, “is work hard to feature speakers that we feel our members would normally pay to hear speak. Whenever we come across a topic we feel impacts our membership, we challenge ourselves to get a speaker to address that subject.”

- “Before each of the last seven luncheon meetings we’ve scheduled a technical session that covers material that would help the normal rep. The subjects in these sessions have been everything from how to prepare and make PowerPoint presentations, to web site design and sales management.

- “Third and finally, we’re very prompt with our meeting schedules. When we say lunch will be over by 1:05 p.m., that’s exactly when it’s finished. We do that so any rep can count on lunch being over, and then he’s in total control of his schedule for the rest of the day.”

Speakers Meet Members’ Needs

Diamond seconds much of what Bissmeyer says when he explains, “We schedule only one luncheon meeting every quarter and we’re sure to always have a speaker who can address a subject of importance and interest to our members.” For instance, among the subjects speakers have addressed are:

- An attorney from the Indiana Attorney General’s office speaking on commission laws.
- Tips on how to successfully conduct business globally — especially in Japan.
- Hands-on presentation on the effective use of the ACT contact management software.
- Developing agency web sites.

Referring to the meetings’ scheduling and content, Diamond is adamant that it’s the secret to the chapter’s success. “As reps we’ve got too much to do as it is. We don’t need a lot of additional meetings. That’s why the quarterly gatherings work best. That, coupled with the subject matter are the real secrets to our success.” To bolster the chances of success, he adds that every effort is made to communicate the meeting date and program content well in advance.



Bill Bissmeyer

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Photo courtesy of the Indianapolis Convention & Visitors Association.



The canal walk in downtown Indianapolis.

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The Value of Networking

“For me,” he explains, “attending these chapter meetings has been a little like attending a professional seminar. We always have a lot to talk about amongst ourselves — and our common concerns spread across all industries. Whether you’re a rep dealing in electronics, OEMs, HVAC, or just about anything else, we all share the same concerns.”

In addition, Bissmeyer points to the fact that dealing with common concerns has created a great deal of camaraderie amongst attendees. “A keynote to all of our organizational efforts has been that we’ve made this a fun group

to be a part of. After all, we’re all in this together. We’re all just trying to make a living, and there’s a lot we can learn from each other.”

Diamond maintains that building the local chapter up to the point where 60 attendees are expected has been relatively easy — owing primarily to the interest everyone has shown. “Part of our secret has been that we always schedule an open meeting where everyone can participate. We keep them short and make sure that whatever message we’ve decided upon is very well directed.”

Based on the continued success that the Indianapolis Chapter has enjoyed, Diamond emphasized that “if others would like to emulate what we’ve done, the best advice I can offer is they should carefully monitor the frequency of their meetings and keep a close eye on schedules. I realized that formerly MANA has stressed the importance of monthly meetings. We haven’t found that works for us. Meeting too often can be a little ho-hum.

Why not start out with four or six a year and then determine what your members’ interests are? If the interest is still at a high level, then add more meetings. With scheduled speakers, ensure that what they speak about is of interest to attendees, and make sure that they stay on the topic.”

In closing, Diamond had some additional advice for MANA members who may be aware of chapter meetings in their area but haven’t taken advantage of them. “I’m a rep, so I know some of the reasons offered for not wanting to participate in this manner. For those reps, I’d offer the warning that they are going to be left behind. Attend local chapter meetings and you’ll learn in a hurry how valuable they are. Attend and you can’t avoid walking away with something that is going to help you and your bottom line.”

For MANA members interested in learning what the Indianapolis Networking Chapter and others like it are involved with, visit www.MANAonline.org.

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