
Manufacturer Finds Rep “Golden Egg”

When a manufacturer describes its outsourced sales force as “the best thing going” and “our golden egg,” chances are there will be a solid relationship between manufacturer and rep. That’s exactly what exists between rep firm South Shore Scientific and Powers Scientific, a Pennsylvania-based manufacturer of a broad range of environmentally controlled chambers used by researchers.

When Candice Scanlon, of MANA member South Shore Scientific, suggested that Powers Scientific be included among the perfect principals that *Agency Sales* began reporting on last year, she had good reason to believe her long-term principal should be there. “I’ve been working with them for 20 years now with great support and profitable results. Their philosophy appears to be that if I sell well and make myself rich, I’m making them rich at the same time. They are a family owned and operated company that is completely focused on the needs of the customer. Their product offering has grown as a result of their innovative approach to the market and by their willingness to listen to reps whenever a new product niche is found. They also are unique in that they attempt to make every effort to support female-owned rep agencies in the scientific market.”

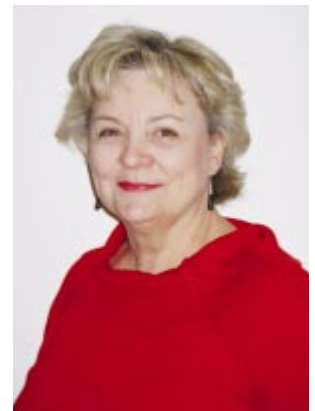
Scanlon reports that she’s in

regular touch with Powers Scientific President Gail Bartholomew, and it’s that constant communication that has supported the solid relationship that has developed between the two over the years. “Gail is an engineer herself, so she has a real appreciation for what we encounter in the field. She provides all the technical support herself and is always on call. She never loses patience with a constant stream of questions from her reps.”

In addition to always being available for any question or problem, Scanlon adds another consideration that any rep would appreciate in their relations with a principal. “Whenever the company gets paid for an order, I get a call from Gail to let me know and to tell me that my commission check is in the mail immediately. In other words, she doesn’t wait ’til the end of the month to make payment, she sees to it that we’re compensated as soon as she is.”



Above: Gail Bartholomew, president, Powers Scientific, Inc., shows Bruce Powers, president, Powers Equipment Co., Inc., one of the manual defrost freezers her company manufactures. **Right:** Candice Scanlon, South Shore Scientific.



Customization Without a Premium

As Scanlon explains, it's not just in its relations with reps that Powers Scientific shines. "They always listen to requests from customers for customization on products — all without charging a premium." She cites examples where UCLA needed special shelving, and several pharmaceutical companies needed some special controls. Those needs were met immediately.

If Scanlon is complimentary of Bartholomew and her company, you haven't heard anything until you hear what the manufacturer's president has to say about Scanlon and her other reps. "Largely because of their personalities, our reps are the best thing going. If ever there was an example of people being our greatest asset, it's seen in the independent reps that we work with. They are, in fact, our 'golden eggs.'"

As if any proof were needed for her words, Bartholomew notes, "With the exception of a few agency owners that have retired, I'd have to say that the majority of reps we work with have been with us since the very beginning."

Bartholomew goes on to describe a variety of attributes reps possess that make them ideal marketing partners. "Our reps person-

ally know all the manufacturers and customers, including all the purchasing people at the labs and universities. And they know them better than any distributor ever could. They make it a practice to know more about the competition than anyone else. On top of all that, our reps represent other lines. That allows us to piggyback on their sales efforts. When they're in there talking to a customer about one line, I know that our products will be in front of the customer as well."

Bartholomew notes that as a result of all that reps do for her company, "We're able to short circuit advertising efforts we might normally undertake. Traditionally, we've never put a lot of dollars and effort behind media advertising. Rather, we work closely with our reps, including supporting their attendance and participation in trade shows."

On the relatively rare occasion when Powers Scientific has to replace a rep, Bartholomew explains, "Among the attributes that a rep must have in order to work with us are an attention to detail and a strong sense of ethics. With the former, it's one thing to just get the order, but after that the customer still needs care. That's what we're looking for. In terms of ethics, we're not looking for someone who wants to make a killing on the first order. Too often if you sell the first order for

an astronomical price, there won't be a second order." She adds that her company doesn't set commission levels. "We tell our reps that this is the list price, you set the price to make the sale. The rep has a say in how much the order will be and he should do it to guarantee repeat sales."

Avoid Overselling

If there's any challenge to working with a network of outsourced sales professionals, Bartholomew notes that she finds it to be primarily in the area of overselling product features. "We make every effort on our product spec sheets to spell out exactly what our products can do in relation to customer needs. If a customer places an order and then inquires about accessories, we make every effort to see that they get exactly what they need to meet their needs."

Looking back at her company's more than two-decade experience of working with reps, Bartholomew notes that one substantial change she's seen in how they operate is that, at least in her industry, there's more office time and less time on the road. "A lot of leads are developed off the Internet," she explains. "Once that lead is received, a good deal of time can be spent ensuring that the rep has the right product available to address the application needs. Then, when they set foot in the customer's place of business, they're fully armed with all the information and know all the questions to ask to get the order. That doesn't mean face time isn't still important, however. It's just that now a lot of work can be done ahead of time."

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Strengthening the Rep Relationship

When asked why and how her company has done such an outstanding job cementing relationships with its reps, Bartholomew points to her company's ability to communicate with its reps and the fact that it's a family-owned business.

"When it comes to communication from our reps, we don't have any quota or limit they have to fulfill. Rather, we want to hear from them when there's some-

thing to hear about. For instance, I hear from Candice Scanlon at least daily. With others, it's not nearly as much." She adds, however, that it's a good idea for a rep to stay in regular touch. "Remember, it's the squeaky wheel that gets the oil."

"We're a small, family-owned business. The company was started by my grandfather, and my brother is in charge of the manufacturing side of the business. Our name goes on the product and we take great pride in that. At the same time, we make sure that we're always accessible to our reps

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and our customers. When one of our reps calls in, they know they can always reach me."