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# Rewards For Pioneering

**A**nd finally, there's Kent Fisher, who has been an independent rep in the pool and spa business for more than 20 years. Fisher spells out loud and clear what a believer he is in working only on pioneering lines for which he is compensated with fixed monthly fees.

If Neumann and the Nelsons generally eschew dependence upon retainers or shared-territorial development fees, it's especially interesting to meet with Fisher, who has built his one-man agency with retainers paid for his pioneering work.

Fisher, Victory Marketing, Santa Clarita, California, has been involved in the pool and spa market for 30 years and only works with retainers. On top of that, he only represents four manufacturers at a time. When his contracted time with one

manufacturer expires, he pulls in another from the wings to fill out his line card.

To begin, here's why and how Fisher has settled on a retainer relationship with his principals. "After working in this business for four years, I realized how difficult it was to gain the services of reps — especially for new products, where there was no business in the territory. After speaking with some business friends, I came to the conclusion that most reps didn't have the time, energy or money to properly fund product introductions. That's when I approached a small manufacturer who couldn't afford a direct sales staff. I offered him a plan where, in exchange for what I thought was a reasonable monthly fee, I would establish and build his sales in a given territory. He accepted, and that was my start."

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## Establishing New Business

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Fisher continues that "I know how most independent representatives feel about working on commission. When there's already established business in a territory, it's much easier to make money on commission sales. But, with the way I operate, I work with relatively small manufacturers that have no business. Since I only work with four manufacturers at a time, each manufacturer is guaranteed 25 percent of my time in front of potential customers. At the end of our contracted time period, I will turn over to the manufacturer an established market. I'll either provide them with all the contacts (i.e., a market database) I've made or I'll turn everything over to a rep firm."

The contracted time periods Fisher speaks about generally run six months, one year or three years. During that period of time, he guarantees a certain number of qualified sales calls, sets sales goals, and forecasts a percentage of sales that he'll close. "Basically, it's a standard business plan that points the manufacturer in the right direction.

"I'm a goal-oriented person, and the way the process usually works for me is like this:

"During the first six months, I'm on my own getting things established.

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“Second six months, I make sales calls and determine a point at which the manufacturer can hope to break even. At the end of six months with one of my principals, I received a handsome raise over my normal retainer because the goals had been reached so quickly.”

Fisher explains that his ability to constantly fill his total of four spots to represent is all about timing, “but right now, I’ve got three more manufacturers waiting to come on board. I won’t accept them until I’m done with one or more of my existing principals. Then I just begin the process all over again.”



*Kent Fisher*

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### **Business Resumé**

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He adds that he’s constantly on the outlook lookout for new lines. “I have a standard business resumé that I hand out to prospective principals. While I work regionally (e.g., California, Nevada, Arizona), the region I cover is the biggest when it comes to pools and spas. Because it’s the largest region for manufacturers, I can handle virtually one quarter of their business. When I speak to manufacturers, I also include a biography of myself detailing my experience in the industry. Then I go on to explain my fees (retainers) and let them know that they can choose from a variety of services. If they want me to develop just California, Arizona and Nevada, that’s fine. If they want New Mexico, Colorado and Washington, I can do that as well, but the size of the retainer will change.”

Supplementing the retainers he’s negotiated with his principals, Fisher provides additional ser-

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vices that manufacturers can pay for, including training of manufacturer and customer personnel.

“Over the years, I’ve found that manufacturers are very receptive to this approach. They seem to have a real understanding of their and my cost of doing business. They realize that by contracting with me they’ll have no employee benefits to pay. Basically, I’m a cheap date.

“Generally, because of the seasonality of the business, my negotiations with principals take

place in May or June and will cover at least the next six months. They all know if they don’t sign on, I’ve got someone else who can and will take their place. I run a tight ship and require a term 30-day termination agreement. I require my payment up front, not after the fact. I don’t work for free.”

He adds that “the proof of the value I provide is found in the responsiveness of the customers I work with coupled with the results that my principals see from my efforts.” □

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