



Canadian Chapters Provide Long-Term Gain

Attracting and then keeping the attention of local reps are the twin concerns facing two of MANA's local networking chapters in Canada.



Al Brosseau

To put the concerns in perspective, Al Brosseau, ALBRO Export & Marketing, Montreal, Quebec, and MANA's district 10 director, uses the analogy of an automobile's constant need for fuel. "When I talk about the benefits that reps can gain from attending their local chapter meetings," he explains, "I think of a car on a long trip. If that car doesn't pull in for gas occasionally, it's never going to reach its destination. So too with MANA members. If they don't pull in to their local chapter meetings, learn all they can from their fellow reps

and speakers and participate in the program, then they're never going to raise the bar on their own performance."

Seconding that view is John Riley, Intercoast Distributors, Inc., Edmonton, Alberta, who notes that while it may be inconvenient for MANA members to carve out time from their busy

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schedules for the regularly scheduled Edmonton meetings, "I look at it this way — it's short-term pain for long-term gain. While the rep may say he's too busy to come to the meeting, there's nothing better for him to be able to achieve professional improvement than by meeting with his fellow reps."

Different Chapters With the Same Goal

To address those joint concerns of attracting and keeping attention, the two chapters — Montreal and Edmonton — have adopted slightly different approaches in order to keep MANA members interested.

Brosseau notes that the Montreal chapter, which has been meeting for about three years, usually schedules its meetings for the same time and location on an every-other-month basis. "We've found that it's very important to stick to a set schedule so your members know exactly what to expect and they can plan their schedules accordingly."

He adds that while the chapter has enjoyed some success with having a set topic for discussion (i.e., legal concerns, finances, computer software), "Once those are covered, we need more to talk about."

To provide that "more to talk about," the chapter has gathered all of the Special Bulletins that MANA has published and used

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them as fodder for meetings. "They provide us with some focus and get the meeting going," Brosseau says.

These steps notwithstanding, the challenge to get as many MANA members as possible together on a regular basis remains. One contributing factor that stands in the way of full attendance, according to Brosseau, "is probably the very nature of reps. Because they're independent businesspeople, their schedules aren't as structured as others. The fact remains, however, that the benefits to be realized from meeting with their peers are substantial. There's so much to learn when meeting and interacting with others who face the same problems and are looking for solutions that you might have already found."

While John Riley in Edmonton admits that "we probably get 75 percent of the available MANA members to our quarterly meetings, the fact is there aren't that many members here to begin with." He notes that the Edmonton chapter has been meeting quarterly for about a year, but hasn't had a meeting since last

fall. To get the ball rolling again this year, the chapter has scheduled its first 2005 meeting this month — but with a twist. According to Riley, "this time we're joining forces with two other rep groups — those serving the electrical and automotive industries. The reason we're doing this is that there's not a great amount of interest for people to come out and just hear me speak. So this time, we're contacting an industry expert to speak on the topic of recruiting 'new blood' for an agency. Our thinking is that by inviting other groups to join us, we'll reach new prospects to really increase our numbers."

He adds that while attendees will have to pay to attend this session in order to cover expenses, "By increasing our numbers, it provides us with the support we need to keep things going in the future."

Riley agrees with Brosseau's "gas-for-the-car" analogy, and his feeling is that by presenting topics such as the one scheduled for this month, "We can really drive a knife into the agency owner's heart in terms of getting and keeping his attention."