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# The Benefits Of Being “Rep Friendly”

“Our lifeblood is our reps. We love to pay commissions to them.”

**W**ith those few words, one manufacturer paints the picture of his company’s relationship between itself and its network of manufacturers’ representatives. Is it any wonder then that this manufacturer, Howden Buffalo, is added to our list of “Perfect Principals”?

It’s certainly makes sense to Sharon Kilborn Keeney, Industrial Marketing Systems, Inc., Twin Peaks, California. According to Keeney, “Howden Buffalo has a well-established methodology for dealing with sales reps and, in my opinion, they are very rep friendly — much more so than any principal we’ve ever dealt with.”

Keeney goes on to enumerate exactly what the manufacturer does to maximize its relationship with its reps and to qualify for the reputation as being “rep friendly.”

- “With no exceptions, whenever a customer calls their headquarters, they’re immediately sent to the area rep.”
- “All proposals that they receive go to the reps to forward to customers.”

- “All orders are taken and written up by the rep.”
- “Most proposals are written by the reps — the exception being those for the largest power proposals.”
- “Most sizing and applications work is done by the reps.”
- “Their regional manager and their web site ([www.howdenbuffalo.com](http://www.howdenbuffalo.com)) direct you to the rep.”
- “Field service coordinates with the reps.”
- “All area visits are with and through the rep office.”
- “They pay commissions on all projects in our area.”
- “They let the reps work out issues between offices and only step in when there is an impasse.”
- “They provide sizing and pricing programs for our use.”
- “They plan their business around sales reps; they do not go in and out of sales reps depending on volume as some principals do.”

Enough said? Not quite! “Our support personnel at the company are there to support us as we work with the customer,” Keeney continues. “Many principals con-

fuse the customer and cause extra work by having multiple contact points. Howden never does this, nor do they fail to let the rep know of activity in the area. We are intimately involved in all interactions with the customers on Howden products in our areas. Howden has done all of the following items at our request:

- Free customer technical seminars.
- Awards to reps at sales meet-



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**Sharon Kilborn Keeney**

ings for sales.

- Web site announcements of large sales by rep office.
- Provides giveaways for customers.
- Available by phone (with the rep) for customer discussions.
- Available for customer meetings (with the rep).

She continues, "We are very comfortable with Howden and our relationship with them. They don't go around us or leave us out. They include the sales rep as an integral long-term part of their business. Because of the relationship they've worked hard to establish, they get a larger share of our time than they might otherwise."

When asked her opinion as to why Howden Buffalo does such a good job working with its reps, Keeney points to a couple of important factors. "I'd say that perhaps the first thing is that that's the way they started doing business from the very beginning. They realize that they are there to support us in everything that we do. As a part of that support, they do a great job in terms of communication. They've got a great web site, plenty of product literature and a constant flow of information."

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### Reps Provide Feet on the Street

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That high level of communication has paid off for the manufacturer in the view of Gene Bayer, national sales manager for Howden Buffalo. It's Bayer who uttered those words about reps being the company's lifeblood that appeared at the beginning of this article. "At last count, I'd say we have 150 rep offices covering the country for us. That translates to about 350 salesmen on the street. And, we love to pay them a lot of commission. That's how we make more money. It would be very difficult for us to sell as well as we do if we used factory salesmen."

Bayer notes that Howden Buffalo, which is the original equipment manufacturer for more than 25 North American fan companies including Buffalo Forge, Joy Fan Company, Westinghouse Sturtevant, Canadian Blower, and others, boasts of a long history of working with reps. "We've found that reps have a real understanding of the marketplace, and they provide us with the day-to-day coverage we need," he explains.

He adds that to achieve that coverage, they've got to compete for the rep's time in front of the customer. "The only way we can get their time," he maintains, "is to make it rewarding for them to do so by providing them with everything they need to get the job done. That means providing the latest in computer software,

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product brochures and specifications, not to mention a diversity of product offerings. And, post-contract we do everything we can to make it easy for them to service the customers."

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### A Belief in Training

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Proof that the manufacturer's efforts in fostering a strong relationship are found in Keeney's words, but Bayer adds, "Our reps as a group really seem to have an appreciation for us as a manufacturer. They understand how we go to market and they know what our problems are. That's owing largely to the fact that we stay in close contact with them. Part of that contact comes from the training that we provide them."

In terms of the regular contact he provides his reps, Bayer notes that since he's located in northern California, "I do a lot of phone contact. But because information transfer is so easy today, it's a lot easier staying in touch with our reps than it was a few years ago."

As to what the manufacturer prefers in terms of communication from its reps, Bayer says, "For the most part our reps are mechanical or aerodynamic engineers. They are very technologically capable. As a result, we simply rely on them to contact us when they have something important to report. Naturally, we don't want call reports covering everything they do."

As he appraises the relationships the company has established with its network of reps, Bayer is quick to note that if there's any one attribute that fosters the strong relationships, it's probably the company's belief in training, and the fact that "years ago we decided to commit to the rep way of going to market. We still have reps with us that started in the '60s and '70s. History has shown that we don't make many changes. We don't have many reps terminating us, nor us terminating them. I believe we do a good job in selecting, retaining and training our reps and providing them with that they need to get the job done." □