

Attributes Of A Good Principal

How's this for a manufacturer's resume — especially as it applies to reps?

- Sells exclusively through manufacturers' representatives.
- Most reps have been with them for years.
- The same can be said for the company's employees.
- Commissions are good — well above average.
- Very few house accounts.
- Offers long-term contracts.
- Appreciates the time and effort the rep puts in to make the sale.



Kenneth J. Karns, president of the manufacturers' rep firm Karns Controls, Inc.

These are just a few of the attributes cited by Ken Karns as he names the latest manufacturer to our list of Perfect Principals — Helwig Carbon Products, Inc.

The Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based company is one of the last American-owned manufacturers of carbon brushes, brushholders, constant force spring assemblies, mechanical carbons, quick disconnect terminals and mounts, sliding contacts, and electrical contacts. Its carbon brushes and holders are used on large industrial motors; both commutator and slipring, fractional horsepower motors, tachometers, synchronous motors, and permanent magnetic motors. Helwig serves a wide range of industries including power generation, steel, paper, motor repair, elevator, railroad, transit, and OEM.

And helping them serve those industries is the Ohio-based Ken Karns, Karns Controls. "I started representing them in 1998, and in the seven years that followed, I've increased the size of their business in my territory."

Years of Rep Experience

It's obviously the above-cited attributes that have encouraged Karns to work as well and as hard

as he does for Helwig. According to Karns, "They are our largest line. They sell exclusively through reps and have done so as far back as the 1930s from what I know. Most of their reps have been on board for decades, a fact which is also true of their employees. It seems as if everyone has been with them for 10 years or more.

"Right out of the box, when I signed on with them in 1998, they offered me a long-term contract. Also, from the very beginning, their communication with me and their other reps has been outstanding. There's no requirement for regular call reports. We fill a lot of our communication needs via our regional sales meetings, and every other year there's a company-wide sales meeting. At the end of the latter, we're always asked what our goals are and what they have to provide in order for us to meet those needs.

"If anything, I'd have to say that I've been spoiled by the way they treat me and keep me in the loop on things I have to know about. The way they work with us shows me how well they think of their reps. The company recently formed a rep council, which is a new concept for them. But that's just another detail related to how they value the contributions their reps provide."

Reps Make Sense

Armed with a network of 25 manufacturers' representatives across the country, Jay Koenitzer,

Helwig Carbon Products' vice president of sales and marketing, confirms that the company only sells through reps. "We've gone to market that way for as long as I can remember," explains Koenitzer. "Our feeling is that reps work best for us. We understand the cost of employing a direct sales force, including salary, cars, expenses and support staff, and reps just make more sense for us. Furthermore, when it comes to writing big checks to any of our reps, naturally we have no objection. All that means to us is that they're selling more of our products and making more money for themselves. We'll never question the wisdom of sending a big check to a rep."

Not that it has to replace reps with any regularity, but Koenitzer explains that when Helwig needs to locate a new rep, "the first thing we'll do is ask our existing rep sales force for a recommendation. We've also had some success by running classified ads in *Agency Sales*."

When searching for those reps, he adds that these are among the many attributes prospective reps must possess:

- A high level of professionalism.
- They must be tech savvy.
- They must be used to hard work and possess a great deal of personal drive.
- Be able to ask penetrating questions.
- Must possess a high level of personal and professional integrity.

When it comes to pinning down the greatest challenge he

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faces when dealing with his reps, Koenitzer offers the same thoughts that others who deal with an outsourced sales force have cited previously: "The biggest thing we face is to try and get them to do what you want them to do." To meet that challenge, he explains that the company has put a variety of programs in place that act as incentives that more than serve the purpose of getting the reps' attention.

Asked to offer an overall appraisal of the relationship between his company and the manufacturers' representatives that they work with, Koenitzer concluded by saying, "I'm not so sure we're any smarter than anyone else that works with reps. What we do, however, is to operate on a foundation built on honesty and integrity. We have expectations of the people we work with, and all we ask is that they meet those expectations. Fortunately for us, the reps we work with are up to the task."

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