



Remember Us? Remember Us!

We're not exactly being redundant here. Instead, what we'd like to communicate is the desire of the Canadian rep to be kept in mind by his U.S.-based manufacturers. If there's any doubt that the desire is sincere, listen to what Jim Keiller, Electrical Insulation & Products, Mississauga, Ontario, has to say.

"We've had U.S. manufacturers tell us that they are going to discontinue their 800-telephone line coverage for Canada because, according to them, 'it's too expensive.' Now, both of these manufacturers have 800-numbers in place for their reps in the United States. Their reasoning is that there's not sufficient business in our territory to justify the line. To me it gets down to the old

'chicken and the egg' story. Which comes first? To my knowledge the 800-line only incurs a cost when someone calls in. If someone calls in, that's more business, right?

"When we brought up the issue with one of the principals, he said if we generate more sales, he'll put the line in again. Isn't that a little backwards? Isn't the 800-line a tool that will encourage sales?"

Keiller explains that he's been a rep for several years, and he takes this kind of thing in stride. "What it does, however, is put a roadblock in the way of increased sales. Shouldn't the manufacturer be doing everything he can to encourage sales? This is just another way you make it difficult to conduct business with your company."

Elimination of the toll-free line isn't the only slight Keiller and other Canadian reps have experienced. "There are a couple of other things we have to endure. For instance, another principal has a line of products he sells

through distribution in the United States. He provides those distributors with all the product literature they need. While we still sell the product here in Canada, however, he's discontinued the literature for us. What we've had to do is go out and print the literature for ourselves. And I'm not done yet. There's another manufacturer that lists all their manufacturers' reps on their web

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site — but not us. And there's still another that bought a new company and forgot to tell us about it.

"I realize we're just one-tenth the market in the United States, and maybe they don't think about us when they make marketing decisions. I ask that U.S. manufacturers keep us in mind and remember that we're here."

When discussing how U.S. manufacturer decisions potentially can impact the Canadian rep, Jim Bray, Automotive Line Technology, Georgetown, Ontario, looks to the American Wild West for an analogy. "Before a decision is made, manufacturers don't have to be like Wyatt Earp and just reach for the holster," he advises. "Think twice before making a decision."

The views that Bray, Keiller and other Canadian reps express point to the very strength that these reps provide their U.S. manufacturers — they live in and know the territory better than anyone else.

For instance, consider the following from one rep:

- "On more than a few instances, here's what's happened to us. Looking for a price, the customer makes a call directly to the factory. Instead of telling the customer that the local rep will be in touch, they bang up a price rather than allowing business to progress as it should. As any rep knows, factory pricing leaves us with hardly any margin to work with. This is done irrespective of the

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one- to three-year effort we may have made to get the sale. What the factory is forgetting is that we have overhead to take care of and we've spent a long time trying to get that sale."

- This rep continues: "We might have 25-30 percent of the market, and we've had occasions when the U.S. manufacturer comes in and takes the approach they know more than anyone else. They forget or ignore the fact that they've already got a Canadian 'sharpshooter' on the ground who knows more about the customer and the territory than they ever will."

- "Or, how about when someone from the head office expresses shock and dismay at the price of an order we get — all the while completely forgetting our dollar (Canadian) is not their dollar. Why can't they keep the exchange rate (which seems to change by the hour) in mind before making a comment? We know it's like dealing with a moving target; so should they."

A Step in the Right Direction

As a counterpoint, under the heading of "We remember you!" we'd like to include the following.

In an effort to foster the relationship between reps and manufacturer — not to mention manufacturers and MANA — here's what Gord Jopling, CPMR, Mechanical Sales Company, Mississauga, Ontario, wants to do with new lines. "We're proposing that as a requirement for us to take on a new line, that the manufacturer commit to attending and completing MANA seminars geared for the manufacturer. It's a thought that's occurred to us as we've completed various seminars for reps, and I'm convinced the outcome could only be positive."

Jopling continues that while he's adopted this new idea, it hasn't actually been implemented yet. "We've mentioned it to a couple of manufacturers that we work closely with that we'd like this to be a requirement in the future. It's our effort to enhance the relationship between rep and manufacturer and to increase the respect each has for the other in the business relationship."

He added that during his networking opportunities with various manufacturers at this year's PTR Conference, it occurred to him that if each side got to see what the other goes through and to gain a share of their vision, it could only better the relationship.

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One Spectrum Pointe, Suite 150, Lake Forest, CA 92630-2283 • Phone: (949) 859-4040 • Toll-free: (877) 626-2776 • Fax: (949) 855-2973
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