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# The End Of The Year Is Near Did You Reach Your Goals?

by JOHN HASKELL

**T**his year I spoke to 22 MANA groups. Twenty of these were rep groups, and I conducted two “Do-It-Yourself Marketing” seminars for manufacturers.

As the year progressed, there were three things that stood out time and time again:

- Neither the manufacturers nor the reps do a good planning job.
- The reps do not “back-sell” to their principals.
- Rep firms do not have a grasp of their own company’s marketing needs, which makes “selling” those firms to current and prospective principals very difficult.

Marketing and sales planning are not very well developed in most industries. Companies seem to think it takes too long or costs too much to plan. Nothing could be further from the truth.

A marketing and sales plan must precede any business plan.

As you read this, your principals are in the fourth quarter of their year. The financial leaders of the business have to plan. The CFO is looking forward trying to figure out what the business is going to look like next year.

Reps do not want financial people to forecast for the company. The “bean counters” are exactly the wrong people to plan the future. When is the last time a CFO made a sale? Financial people — the good ones — are a real asset to the reps, but if and only if the reps know how to “carry the ball to the boss.” The reps have to take the initiative to provide their principals with revenue forecasts for next year.

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## Top-Down Does Not Work

The type of forecasting that most reps find themselves doing

is based on a directive or demand from the company. “Tell us how you are going to increase sales 20 percent in 2006.”

This is a lousy exercise. Only the rep who calls on the customer has any idea what volume a particular line can do with that customer next year.

Only the rep is close enough to the customer to find out what the customer has planned and what the customer’s marketing, sales and promotion plans are.

By being close to the customer, the reps are positioned to be a major resource for their principals — but only if they *do it!*

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## Back-Selling is Vital

Back-selling is defined as “The process of selling back up the channel to the principal. The goal of back-selling is to have the key personnel know and understand the approach, activities and accomplishments of the rep firm and individual representatives within the firm. Back-selling should be a proactive outreach effort carefully planned and effectively executed

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# Look At The End Before You Start What Does It Take To Win In '06?

***Having a plan to proactively protect what you have with your principals and build better relationships is critical to having a good 2006.***

by the rep firm. Back-selling is a vital part of the rep's annual business plan. It is the inner-directed marketing and sales plan."

In the 20 programs I conducted with rep groups, we spent four hours discussing all elements of "back-selling." The key is for each rep and rep firm to develop a structured plan for selling back up the channel to the principals.

Having a plan to proactively protect what you have with your principals and build better relationships is critical to having a good 2006. How many times have you or one of your rep friends said "I expect to have a great year — We have some great lines"? But, when you or they look back, it turned out to be a terrible year because you lost a key line before the end of the first quarter.

Reps are often accused of being paranoid. That paranoia is justified because someone is usually out to get you. Jealous sales managers, greedy CFOs, and all sorts of other people who do not understand the rep business can make a rep's life miserable.

Whose fault is that? Yours. Why? Because you were not back-selling.

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## **Marketing the Rep Firm is Critical to Success**

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So many of the most basic things are neglected by very smart, very capable reps. The most important of those is the line card. Selling without a line card is like trying to write an order without a pen. It can't be done.

Why is the line card so vital?

The line card explains the structure of the rep firm. It shows how the multiple-line selling backbone of the company is structured and how the reps in the firm work the market.

Without a good line card, the rep firm is not positioned in its market. Without a good line card, the rep firm has no simple leave-behind that tells the buyer who you are and what your firm is all about.

One very smart rep at one of my seminars explained the line card in light of a prior life. He had been the purchasing manager for a multi-billion dollar oil company. He said, "Line cards are the most valuable tool a rep could give me. I used the line cards to make it

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faster and easier to respond to requests by our personnel. A good line card makes it easy to do business with a rep's principals."

### Clean up Your Line Package

Finally, your line card should show all of your lines. You should only represent lines that provide five percent or more of your income. Don't represent minor, low-level lines. As you end 2005, make a point to drop the losers.

So there you have it. A few points to consider as you finish 2005 and you launch your planning for 2006. Happy holidays. Don't hesitate to call or e-mail. I'm always glad to help.

Suggest to your principals that they attend a Dr. Revenue *Maximizing Rep Results* seminar. Go to [www.MANAonline.org](http://www.MANAonline.org) for details. □

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

*John Haskell, Dr. Revenue, is a professional speaker/seminar leader with more than 30 years' experience working with and managing reps. He has developed specific programs for rep marketing planning, principal relations management and rep profile development. His web site, [www.DrRevenue.com](http://www.DrRevenue.com), includes a special section exclusively for manufacturers' representatives. Contact him at [DrRevenue@DrRevenue.com](mailto:DrRevenue@DrRevenue.com); phone: (800) 332-0258.*

