
Believing In Reps Since Dirt Was Discovered

When Eriez Magnetics, Erie, Pennsylvania, was recommended as a manufacturer to join the list of “Perfect Principals,” here’s how one rep attested to their commitment to independent manufacturers’ representatives: “They have been working with reps since dirt was discovered, and some of their reps go back that far.”



Left to right: Fred Schwab, SECO, Medina, OH; Charlie Ingram, vice president sales & marketing, Eriez Magnetics; Keith Jones, director, corporate communications, Eriez Magnetics; and Don Johnson, Power & Process Technologies, Inc., Spencerport, NY, discuss a product modification suggested during a recent Eriez Rep Council meeting. Note: Don Johnson was a charter member of the first Eriez Rep Council. Both SECO and Power & Process are MANA members.

The Search For The Perfect Principal

Last year, MANA asked its members for recommendations of manufacturers they work with that exhibit the qualities of respect, understanding, quality products and service, leadership, communication, integrity, and a partnership mentality. What we were looking for were descriptions of manufacturers that fit the mold for the kind of marketing partner reps are constantly seeking. We were deluged with responses. In June 2004, *Agency Sales* magazine began a series of articles on the perfect manufacturer. Each month, as we report on those manufacturers, we will add to the list.

- **Angola Wire Products**, Angola, Indiana. Products: Welded wire subassemblies, baskets, display racks, laser cut and formed steel.
- **Manth-Brownell, Inc.**, Kirkville, New York. Products: High-volume screw machine, machining services and CNC.
- **Specialty Screw Corporation**, Rockford, Illinois. Products: Cold forming, non-standard engineered fasteners.
- **Bradford White Corporation**, Ambler, Pennsylvania. Products: Water heaters for residential, commercial and hydronic space heating applications.
- **Empire Comfort Systems (ECS), Inc.**, Belleville, Illinois. Products: Space heating, fireplace and outdoor products.
- **Emseal Joint Systems, Ltd.**, Westborough, Massachusetts. Products: Comprehensive line of expansion joints, joint sealants and gaskets.
- **Teledyne Hastings Instruments**, Hampton, Virginia. Products: A complete line of vacuum instruments and flow instruments.
- **Birchwood Casey**, Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Products: A variety of gun care products for professional gunsmiths, shooters and collectors, including gun-cleaning solvents, stock finish, bluing, lubricants and rust preventives.
- **Remington Arms Company, Inc.**, Industrial Products Division, Lonoke, Arkansas. Products: Industrial ammunition, industrial kiln guns.
- **Legend Valve & Fittings, Inc.**, Shelby Township, Michigan. Products: Valves designed specifically for the professional wholesaler and contractor.
- **Powers Scientific**, Pipersville, Pennsylvania. Products: A broad range of environmentally controlled chambers to meet researchers' needs.
- **SJE-Rhombus**, Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. Products: Liquid level control, and electromechanical and microprocessor-based control panels.
- **Scot Forge Company**, Spring Grove, Illinois. Products: Custom open die and rolled ring forgings.
- **National Products Company**, Louisville, Kentucky. Products: Wood kitchen cabinet and commercial casework products.
- **Howden Buffalo**, Camden, South Carolina. Products: Custom-engineered air movement equipment for many industries and applications.
- **Helwig Carbon Products, Inc.**, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Products: Carbon brushes, brushholders, constant force spring assemblies, mechanical carbons, quick disconnect terminals and mounts, sliding contacts and electrical contacts.
- **Jordan Valve**, a division of Richards Industries, Cincinnati, Ohio. Products: A variety of products including pressure regulators, back pressure regulators, temperature regulators, pneumatic and electric control valves, sanitary valves and accessories.
- **Niagara Cutter**, Amherst, New York. Products: Standard and special cutting tools including solid carbide, diamond coated, high-speed steel, cobalt and milling cutters.
- **PIAB USA Inc.**, Hingham, Massachusetts. Products: A variety of vacuum products.
- **Eriez Magnetics**, Erie, Pennsylvania. Products: Advanced technology for magnetic, vibratory and metal detection applications.

The fact that the Erie, Pennsylvania-based manufacturer has a long track record with reps is bound to get anyone's attention, but there's more to the story than longevity. Our attention was further piqued when Charlie Ingram, Eriez Magnetic's vice president of sales and marketing, detailed the company's rep philosophy at the MANA/NEMRA *Keystone 2005* conference in Louisville, Kentucky. He followed up on that presentation by describing how the company set up and continues to run a successful rep council. An article on that subject appears on page 6 in this issue of *Agency Sales* magazine.

In terms of working with reps "since dirt was discovered," Ingram notes that the company currently works with 36 agencies throughout the United States. "The average length of service for our agencies is close to 20 years, and we have three agencies that go back more than 50 years."

As to why Eriez Magnetic has made such a commitment to the rep way of going to market, Ingram explains that "obviously, employing a direct sales force is very expensive. Reps are a variable cost and provide us with an efficient and economical way to reach our markets." That's not all, however. "If you're a national or an international company, it's absolutely impossible to make contact with the customer base you're interested in with a direct

sales force. Reps provide you with the local knowledge you need, certainly well beyond what a direct salesperson could provide. Reps know the specific features of your market, thereby giving you the best chance for success."

Finding Reps

While Ingram and Eriez Magnetics can boast lengthy tenures with their reps, there are occasions when a rep has to be replaced or otherwise found to cover a territory. When that occurs, Ingram explains that he generally follows three paths to meet the need:

- "The first thing I'll do is consult the *MANA Online Directory*. What I look for there are reps already in the territory who presently carry complementary lines.
- "The next thing I'll do is check with a sales manager colleague from a non-competing manufacturer. This is usually someone I know who may have experience with reps we share in other territories.
- "Finally, I've made it a practice to contact reps we already have experience with and ask their opinions on recommending others."

A contributing reason why the manufacturer has been able to achieve longstanding relationships with its reps has to be its belief in and practice of communication. To that end, the company boasts a password-protected web site for its reps called the

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"Eriez Orange Room." According to Ingram, the site, which came about from a suggestion made at a rep council meeting, provides reps with "24/7 information concerning the company and its practices. The Orange Room is all about speed of communication. Speed is the name of the game, and our speed kills the competition."

The Eriez Orange Room

As Ingram noted during his presentation at the MANA/NEMRA *Keystone* conference earlier this year, the Orange Room contains everything the rep needs to do his job well including standard letters, quote forms, PowerPoint sales presentations, information on available inventory, standard equipment drawings, order forms, spec sheets and credit applications. And, perhaps most important, the Orange Room is the main source for the reps' sales leads. According to Ingram, "We generate more than 40,000 sales leads annually, and those leads are communicated to our reps — with speed — via our web site."

Two-Way Communication

If Eriez practices constant communication with its reps via its web site and rep council, Ingram urges his reps — and reps in general — to practice commu-

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nication with their principals in return. “Don’t be invisible to your manufacturer. I’m here to tell you that you’ll never receive the credit you’re due unless you take that credit. There’s no way your manufacturers can know about all that you do in the field unless you tell them about it. Now, does that mandate call reports? Absolutely not. We used to use call reports until about the third week I started working for the company. I remember that when I was in sales I hated to write them, so why wouldn’t my

reps hate to do them today? Your job as a rep is to manage and work your territory. Sales call reports are just stuff, they’re clutter.”

But based on years of experience with his reps, here’s what Ingram and Eriez find to be useful things to communicate about.

“Our reps communicate with us by:

- Letting us know what their plans are for the coming year.
- What are your succession plans? If anything, we lose sleep over that one.
- Are you adding any lines? Dropping anyone?
- What are you doing differently in the territory now than you were before?
- Do you need any product market training?
- Any trade shows in your territory that we should know about?
- What do you need in terms of headquarters support? What do you need from us that you’re not getting?
- Just let us know about those matters and we’ll work much more effectively together.”

Building a Partnership

If the manufacturer gets the type of communication from its reps that Ingram has just described, chances are those agencies are the ones that will be able to enjoy the benefits of the lengthy tenures that others before them have. According to Ingram, “We’ve had the benefit of working with reps almost since the beginning of our company. We’ve been able to grow as a company along with many of our reps who have spanned the years to become second- and third-generation firms. Those reps have become extensions of our company. At the same time, we at Eriez have worked hard to not sit in an ‘ivory tower.’ We’ve worked through and with our reps in order to accomplish what we hope are our aligned objectives. What it all comes down to is everyone understanding what the other wants and needs and then meeting those wants and needs. On top of that, we can always agree to disagree and grow together.”

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