

# MAXIMIZING COMMUNICATION



EDITORIAL | JACK FOSTER

[REP COMMUNICATION GUIDES PRINCIPALS]

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**“More business is lost as a result of poor communication than any other practice.”** Those words serve as a sobering introduction to a discussion of the need for the independent manufacturers’ representative to be an effective communication practitioner.

According to **Harry Abramson**, a rep veteran and regular contributor to **Agency Sales Magazine**, “If there’s anything I’ve learned over the course of my career, it’s the need for the rep to be a regular and effective communicator.”

Any talk of communication, according to Abramson, begs the question of whether or not reps are effective communicators. “Without effective communication on our part, how is the manufacturer going to know what the customers’ needs are? How can they anticipate needs? Provide pricing? Make deliveries? It’s all on our shoulders to communicate that information from the customer to the principal.”

Too often, the rep falls into a trap of not communicating certain details that are truly important and impact his business, he maintains. “Salesmen, in general, focus on just the week, month, year, or price. Instead, we’ve got to consider the complete picture and be able to communicate all aspects of a situation — short and long-term.”

Abramson adds that “If a rep is a poor communicator in his business, he’s probably a poor communicator with others, including his family.”

Abramson, Electronic Salesmasters Inc., Beachwood, Ohio, feels so strongly about the need to communicate that he states, “I harp on it all the time during our company sales meetings. In fact, whenever I’ve got one of our salesmen on the phone as he’s traveling from one sales call to another, I communicate. I’m always consulting a data folder that I call up on my computer. The folder contains pending opportunities for our salespeople. I never waste the opportunity to communicate and review all segments of our business. If we make it a habit to communicate those issues clearly — with our sales force, our principals, and certainly our customers — then we’ll be positioned to capture the necessary business in order to be successful.”

If a rep is a poor communicator — and he recognizes that fact — is there anything he can do to right the ship? Abramson purports that he may have a chance if he remembers the concepts we’ve already covered:

- + Reps are businessmen in sales
- + Sales are lost as the result of poor communication
- + Communicate the entire picture (e.g., not just price, etc.)

Remembering these will improve his performance. But there’s more to it than that. “Sure there are any number of communication disciplines you should concentrate on, but what I’ve learned is that you’ve got to be retrospective. That means

having the ability to reflect on your business and on what you’re doing about the business.”

Another important practice that Abramson maintains to be an integral part of effective communication is the discipline of speaking with all of the *influencers*. “You can’t just speak with the buyer, who sometimes is on the lowest rung of the influence ladder. You must have the ability to sell high — all the way to a company’s president or chief executive. And while you’re at it, don’t forget engineering and program managers. They’re all part of the communication loop.”

Abramson explains that the importance of communication in the rep business model is something that has always been with him. “I’d have to say that communication has been one of the hallmarks of my approach to the business. If anything, I believe the ability to communicate has been a major contributor to my agency’s success. I’d add to that the importance of having in place an effective support team — all the members of which believe in communication.

“Even when there’s no need for me to be in the communication loop, I’m positive my inside team is communicating effectively — and they never hesitate to share with me any obstacles or matters of importance. I have never been a believer in micro-managing, but I do want to be communicated with or copied on matters of importance. And they always do that.”

When Abramson says he likes to be copied on various matters, he clarifies that he’s talking about being copied in writing — he’s a big believer in following up spoken communication with a written copy. “I’ve found that the best communicators are usually those who are able to put it in writing.”

As an example of the importance he places on this practice, he cites the example where a principal may ask the oft-repeated question: “What have you done for me lately?” According to Abramson, “I always respond: ‘I’m glad you asked.’ Then I let him know that we’ve recently made x-number of requests for product samples and we have 23 open opportunities that total more than \$14 million. This is a great way to communicate, and it *never* fails to get their attention.”

Putting a cap on this discussion covering the importance of communication, Abramson notes, “Obviously the audiences that the rep must be able to communicate with are his own team, his principals and his customers. And, when I say ‘communicate,’ I don’t mean being talkative or glib. That’s not communication. They must be able to send and receive messages from their business contacts and then take action. In my opinion, the top communicators are the top performers.”

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