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MANA and reps come to the rescue, aiding principals in understanding how to develop mutually beneficial relationships.

REPS + TO THE RESCUE

BY JERRY LETH



We are hearing a lot lately about manufacturers that “get it.” When I had my manufacturers’ rep business, I was fortunate to work with several principals that “got it,” and without exception, they were very successful companies. I began thinking, “What is it about these companies that makes them this way?”

About 15 years ago, I was interviewing a prospective principal that came highly recommended by a fellow rep. He told me it was a great company, one that got it. We reached an agreement and I travelled to Houston for product training and to meet the people with

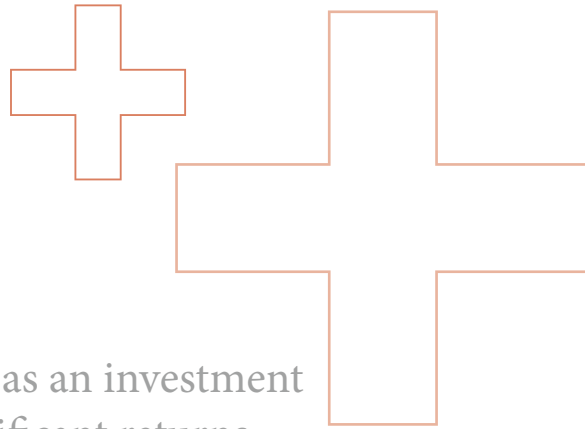
whom I would be interfacing. It became very obvious that all of the employees really loved what they were doing and the company they worked for.

A few weeks later, the sales manager visited the territory and we called on some new prospects, as well as a number of existing customers. It was apparent that the customers loved this company too. So it should come as no surprise that at the first sales meeting I attended, I learned the manufacturers’ reps felt the same way.

What was the reason for this company’s success? The owner/CEO understood relationships –

how to value the employees, customers and manufacturers’ reps, and how to work with each for mutually beneficial, long-term relationships. That’s what we mean when we say they get it.

There was a seamless interdependence between the manufacturer, the manufacturers’ reps and the customers, all working together for a common purpose. So much for the rep being “independent.” This was the common thread between these principals I represented that got it. With my other principals, there were three separate relationships, without a strong common purpose.



LOOK at this as an investment that can bring significant returns.

Working with a principal that can notably **BOOST** sales for them in your territory and consequently increase your profits. **GETS IT**



At MANA we have learned that there are three types of principals: those that get it, those that don't but want to, and those that don't and believe it's their way or the highway.

As manufacturers' reps, we are always looking to represent the first group and avoid the last, but what about those that have the potential to get it, particularly if they have a product that really fits your line card? What if you already represent these companies? Is there a strategy to help convert these companies to good principals?

We believe, based on experience and past history, that these companies can learn how to get it. If they have a willingness to learn, there are programs available for them. MANA offers several programs in Chicago to assist manufacturers in the process. The following is the schedule for the spring series:

- Successfully Building a Rep Network (March 18-19);
- Rep Channel Management Success Strategies (April 15-16);
- Mutual Action Planning: The

Process That Leads to a Collaborative Rep-Mfg Culture (for manufacturers and manufacturers' reps, May 13).

MANA also conducts in-house programs, in which we visit a facility to educate and transform the corporate culture into one that gets it. See our ad on page 16 or visit www.MANAonline.org for full details and to register. MRERF (Manufacturers' Representatives Educational Research Foundation) also offers seminars for manufacturers.

How do you get these principals to attend the appropriate program? Start by telling them about MANA and what we do. If you know other reps that are MANA members that represent the company, enlist them to help convince the principal of the benefits of learning how to work successfully with reps. Let MANA help too, inform our office and we will be glad to send the principal information.

This requires some action on your part, but look at this as an investment that can bring significant

returns. Working with a principal that gets it can notably boost sales for them in your territory and consequently increase your profits. We've spoken to MANA members that have gone so far as to cover the seminar registration fee for principals, and they tell us it was well worth it. If you did not read Paul Pease's article, "Surviving or Thriving – Is There an Option?" in the January 2009 *Agency Sales* magazine, I suggest you go back and do so. It will give you an idea of the results you can expect.

MANA even offers an educational package for manufacturer members. The package includes attendance to one MANA seminar, as well as a premium ad at a substantial discount. Get all the details about the manufacturer education program on the MANA website, just click the "Seminar" link on the home page.

Some members have told us they would feel threatened if their principals joined MANA. What if the manufacturer uses the



WHAT IF you currently represent a principal that **DOESN'T GET IT** and has


NO INTEREST IN LEARNING?

resources to find a replacement rep? If you are a professional, this shouldn't be a concern. If you get the manufacturer to join and they end up "getting it" as a result, the odds are good they will appreciate what you have done for them and place even more value in your relationship. If a non-MANA member were to try and steal the line from you (a violation of the MANA code of ethics), our belief is they will not prosper. Just ask yourself what it is worth to you, in real dollars, if a principal doesn't get it but wants to. If the principal then learns to have better, more successful relationships with you and their other reps, isn't that worth the risk?

What if you currently represent a principal that doesn't get it and has no interest in learning how? Have you figured out, again in real dollars, how much that principal is costing you? Have you sat down and done a profitability analysis on their line to see if it is generating any profits at all? You may be

surprised at the results. Your best course of action may be to terminate the relationship and replace it with a new principal that gets it.

The strategy that we recommend, implemented by most successful manufacturers' reps, is to always be working towards rep-

resenting only those high quality principals that get it. You can start by dropping those that don't and helping those that want to learn. The end result is a line card with nothing but high quality principals. 



JERRY LETH

Leth, Manager of Membership, joined MANA in August 2000. As part of his responsibilities, he has spoken at a number of conferences on issues relating to professional outsourced sales companies. He also is an instructor at MANA seminars for manufacturers and manufacturers' agents and counsels members on business issues relating to the rep/principal relationship.

Previously, Jerry owned and operated Letco Tech Sales, Inc., a MANA member, multi-line professional outsourced sales agency, for 10 years. Before starting his own agency, he was Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Torque & Tension Equipment, an importer of a UK-manufactured line of electronic torque analyzers sold through a network of sales agencies. Jerry graduated from Stanford University with a degree in Mechanical Engineering and worked for Hills Brothers Coffee in San Francisco in engineering and production before embarking on a sales career.