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# MANA Manufacturer Works with Reps To Create Demand

BY JACK FOSTER

## A SEA CHANGE

has occurred in the way customers buy. This, combined with rapid-fire innovation of technological tools, has altered the way independent manufacturers' representatives create demand and otherwise anticipate and meet the needs of their principals and customers. Should we view this as good or bad, a threat or an opportunity? To properly understand what has happened and what continues to occur in the marketplace, it's necessary to appreciate the fact that the way the customer acts today is much different than yesterday.

### Flattening of the Customer Base

The historical top-down pyramidal structure of U.S. business management has been dramatically revamped. The new, flatter structure entails a streamlined management team, team project responsibilities, mixed skills and job content and the widespread use of information systems. The result is that customers are more knowledgeable, more analytical and have more choices than ever before. At the same time, they are also juggling more responsibilities and have less time to spend with salespeople. Therefore they expect more from the salespeople with whom they conduct business.

### An Accelerating Pace of Technology

The speed at which computers and software have

absorbed manual tasks in the field, the workplace and the corporate office is truly amazing. The pace of technology is accelerating, leaving companies and employees further and further behind in the race to be competitive and productive. Technological advances in web-based marketing, demand-generation marketing and social networking enable buyers to learn about a manufacturer's solutions, and those of the competition, without ever speaking to the manufacturer or their rep organization.

When these variables are considered, what does it all mean? Essentially, the result is that a manufacturer's buyers are shopping without the input from the manu-

## WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

facturer. If and when they are ready to engage, they will contact the manufacturer or their rep. Until then, they are in control of the sales cycle, not the manufacturer. If a manufacturer's information is not available to the customer, if the manufacturer's messaging does not differentiate them from the competition, and if the



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manufacturer's rep organization is not able to articulate value beyond products and services (i.e., value add), the manufacturer and his rep may simply be overlooked. That this is a frightening situation for manufacturers not using these new capabilities is an understatement.

### **Leaving the Old for the New**

Given these new realities for most small to mid-sized manufacturers, transitioning to new methods of engaging prospects and customers may be viewed as a daunting task. In this hectic business climate, the revenue and profit pressures tend to take over, leaving little time to revamp old selling and marketing styles. As a result, the vicious cycle continues and there's no winning in this game.

The old methods of selling and marketing (i.e., making calls and following up) are no match for customers who are tougher, smarter, information-savvy and have more choices. Those employing the old methods are certainly less effective than competitors who are embracing these changes. Manufacturers who can deploy technology-based marketing methods and who arm their rep organizations with the information, tools and skills to compete in this ever-changing market will consistently outperform those who do not.

To aid those manufacturers and their reps in consistently creating demand in a tumultuous marketplace, Sales Engine International (SEI, [www.salesengineintl.com](http://www.salesengineintl.com)) has developed a marketing execution system that can be tailored to the needs of a specific manufacturer

## **OLD METHODS OF SELLING AND MARKETING ARE NO MATCH**

and rep. SEI's system is designed to meet three objectives for manufacturers and their reps:

1. To position a company's brand, product information and value proposition in front of prospects on a consistent basis;
2. To generate high-quality leads by identifying those prospects that are ready to buy;
3. To provide rep organizations with the needed tools that will allow them to be effective by selling value beyond products and services.



## CONTENT NEEDS TO INTEREST AND ENGAGE ALL PROSPECTS

In order to achieve those objectives, SEI provides their manufacturers and the manufacturers' reps with many tools:

- **A complete prospect database.** Independent manufacturers' representatives live for valid customer prospects in their territory. The marketing execution system creates that database and works with reps to identify those prospects they want to target.

- **Consistent messaging and content.** No matter what territory the manufacturer is selling into with his reps, it's critical that the message remains consistent and on point. At the same time, it's important that there is sufficient and varied sales content to communicate with the entire prospect database. One must remember that not all prospects are ready to buy. As a result, content needs to interest and engage all prospects across the buying continuum.

- **A method of maintaining "top-of-mind awareness" with prospects.** Prospects must hear from manufacturers and their reps with regularity. The key, however, is to not turn them off with gimmicky sales pitches. This marketing execution system fills the communications gap by providing a monthly e-newsletter, which offers prospects the opportunity to request additional informa-

tion and create an electronic dialog or video presentation. All these efforts are geared to move the prospect to the ready-to-buy position.

- **Marketing automation and uninterrupted execution to maximize lead conversions.** As prospects interact with the system those interactions contribute to a nurturing process that generates highly qualified leads, signaling reps when the prospect is ready to buy.

- **A toolkit for the manufacturers' rep organizations.** Reps have taken it for granted that they are called upon to consume and digest a great deal of information concerning their manufacturers and the products they represent. The fact is that each manufacturer with whom the rep works is competing for the rep's attention, time and mindshare. That's why a concept of a rep "toolkit" was developed. This sales-pitch-in-a-box offers reps product presentations in video and audio format, solution scenarios that go beyond product features and functions, expert testimonials and success stories from satisfied customers. The toolkit reinforces the rep's message, drives consistency about the value proposition and assists the rep in being more effective as he presents the unique solutions.

One such manufacturer that has adopted this method of creating demand with its reps is MANA associate member NEO Orthotics, Inc. ([www.neoorthotics.com](http://www.neoorthotics.com)), East Peoria, IL. NEO manufactures a full line of custom orthotics and braces, plus a scanning system that uses computerized foot imaging for the creation of orthotics.

According to Tim Potendyk, president and CEO of NEO Orthotics, "Our goal in implementing the SEI process is to create high-potential leads for our reps. It's as simple as this: we recognize that more and more prospects are gravitating to the Internet, that includes social media, to get the product information they need. If we and our reps are to continue being players in the process, that's why we're there too." As an example, he cites the Facebook page that the company has created.

While Potendyk acknowledges that it's a bit too early to cast an overly-critical eye on the lead generation process, he says that thus far little or no difficulty has been encountered. "We're well aware of the fact reps can be apprehensive regarding their experiences in developing a territory for the manufacturer and then having the manufacturer pull the business. Our perspective – and this is why we're using the SEI process – is to provide our reps with a good supply of well-qualified leads. We want them to be successful."

"We completely appreciate the value of our reps and the personal relationships [they have developed,] as well as the steps that the rep has taken to establish, nurture and maintain those relationships. Our goal is to build on those relationships and ensure that the rep has the

best chance for success when he meets face-to-face with the prospect. That's why it's so important that we continue to provide qualified leads."

He adds that another consideration of his company's lead generation efforts is the use of social media. "One of the major tasks for us, especially when dealing with Generation Y, is that they use social media extensively. That's why we're there." He adds that thus far he's found no reluctance on the part of his rep sales force to take advantage of the benefits offered by both SEI and the use of social media.

### Helping the Rep Get in the Door

Echoing much of what Potendyk says, Paul Rafferty, SEI's CEO, notes that what's available here is "a system that has been invented by sales executives. The reason this evolved is that we know how difficult it is today for reps to get in the door to meet with prospects. And, if they're successful in getting face-to-face with the prospect, then it's often difficult to deliver a consistent message without proper support and backup from manufacturers."

Reinforcing the notion that the world of sales and marketing has changed drastically, Rafferty drew from his own experience to illustrate what reps are going through. "Just this past weekend, I bought a leaf blower for myself. Just as so many other prospects, I went online, and within five minutes I had 45 product reviews. That's the same case with prospects in other industries. What's happened is that too often the rep is being pushed out of the value chain. This process puts him back in there by creating demand and validating prospects."

If manufacturers and reps opt to use a targeted demand process such as described here, Rafferty cautions that "Whatever is done, it must be integrated into a comprehensive sales and marketing strategy. Back in the day, manufacturers had communications specialists who provided much of the back up that reps needed. Now all that information appears online, whether it's bylined articles, brochure[s] or ads."

He continues that to complement such a demand process, reps would do well to make use of all the technological tools they have at their disposal. "That includes the various social media tools," he says. "Search out and



## OUR GOAL IS TO BUILD ON RELATIONSHIPS AND ENSURE THAT THE REP HAS THE BEST CHANCE FOR SUCCESS.

use tools such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook. In the past, there may have been a total dependence upon the Rolodex. Joining and using social networking tools, reps will find prospects that have already raised their hands and showed an interest in what they're offering. In addition, these are ideal opportunities to garner suggestions and trade ideas with peers." 

