
A Perfect Principal Doubleheader



When Harold Armstrong was asked for his recommendation for the “Perfect Principal,” he couldn’t stop at one — so he went on to provide two manufacturers to add to the list of principals that *Agency Sales* began two years ago. Armstrong’s recommendations are:

- **BETE Fog Nozzle, Inc.**, Greenfield, Massachusetts, manufacturers of more than 20,000 different nozzles. The company pioneered the use of Teflon and titanium for nozzles, and is the only nozzle manufacturer with a complete in-house investment casting foundry.
- **Conbraco Industries, Inc.**, Matthews, North Carolina, manufactures brass valves and fittings including the Apollo Series 70 ball valve for the commercial market.

While the two are manufacturers of different products serving a different customer mix, they seemed strikingly similar in the ways they work — and have worked for years — with independent manufacturers’ representatives.

“It’s not just one thing that they do right in dealing with reps,” maintains Armstrong, Armstrong/Weatherly Assocs., Houston, Texas. “It’s a combination of everything that really comprises the cultures of their respective companies. Both manufacturers constantly communicate with us and their customers. That’s the key to our

relationships. Our agency experience has been that 95 percent of all business problems evolve from a lack of communication. We covet the kind of communication we receive from these manufacturers, whether it’s phone, fax, e-mail or in person. It’s never an inconvenience or imposition to hear from your manufacturer.”

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The Search For The Perfect Principal

Two years ago, 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* 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.
- **Lumsden Corporation**, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Products: Metal belts, heavy-duty wire cloth and spiral-woven conveyor belting.
- **BETE Fog Nozzle**, Greenfield, Massachusetts. Products: More than 20,000 different nozzles. The company pioneered the use of Teflon and titanium for nozzles, and is the only nozzle manufacturer with a complete in-house investment casting foundry.
- **Conbraco Industries**, Matthews, North Carolina. Products: Brass valves and fittings including the Apollo Series 70 ball valve for the commercial market.

second attribute the manufacturers have in common is their commitment to their respective marketing plans. "BETE Fog Nozzle and Conbraco are both privately-held companies," he explains. "In addition to being readily accessible to their reps, their management is involved in all aspects of their companies' day-to-day activities. Whenever problems occur, they look at the problem as an opportunity to better serve the customer."

In Armstrong's view, "Both companies are marvelous to work with. They respond well to us and to their customer base. They support us in every manner and provide us with what we need to get the job done. We're always looking for the positives in our relationships with principals and that's what BETE Fog Nozzle and Conbraco give us — a positive relationship."

That positive relationship works both ways according to the two manufacturers.

Half-Century Commitment to Reps

BETE Fog Nozzle President Matthew Bete explains, "We've been in the business for more than 55 years, and we've been working with independent manufacturers' representatives for as long as I can remember."

As to why reps better meet the needs of the manufacturer vs. a direct sales force, Bete points to the reps' ability to provide the company with instant coverage in a territory "and the ability to provide solutions to the customers' needs. We're especially aware of the rep's synergistic approach to the marketplace. The rep who carries products that are complementary to ours gets in front of the cus-

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tomers with his full line and is able to offer our products as a solution to the customer's problems."

Bete is especially proud of the tenure his company enjoys with the agencies it works with. He notes that the average tenure is around 15 years and there are some agencies that BETE Fog Nozzle has worked with for as long as 35 years. Despite that laudable track record with agencies, occasions do arise when the manufacturer has to find a new rep. When that happens, Bete explains that in addition to working with a couple of rep search firms, word-of-mouth remains the most effective means for finding a replacement.

Looking at the reps the company already works with and certainly keeping in mind what he desires in a rep, Bete cites "an intimate knowledge of and a commitment to our product line is probably the number-one attribute we look for in a rep. In addition, the rep must be actively engaged in working in the field with customers and staying in close touch with customers."

Just as Bete wants the rep to stay in close touch with the customer, so too does he want a tight communication loop between the manufacturer and the rep. To that end, in addition to communication as needed in the form of phone, fax and e-mail, BETE Fog Nozzle communicates to its reps at least monthly on activities within the company. "Additionally, we like to see the reps here

at the factory at least on an annual basis."

Enjoying the Relationship

When asked for his thoughts on the fact that one of his reps thought so much of the relationship between rep and manufacturer that it would nominate his company as a "Perfect Principal," Bete responds, "Fortunately for both of us, we're in a growth industry. Perhaps when things are going so well some of the blemishes in the relationship can be hidden. But as I look at the relationship, the key is that we truly enjoy the relationship we have with our reps. Sure, just as anyone else in business we'll have our occasional 'dust-ups,' but those occasions are isolated. And, when problems do occur, we take care of them."

While Bete and Cal Mosack, president and CEO of Conbraco, were interviewed separately for this article, their thoughts and comments regarding the relationships they enjoy with their reps were remarkably similar.

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Reps as the Only Way

According to Mosack, “We’ve been in business for 77 years now after founding the company in Michigan. Throughout that time, we’ve always marketed our products through reps. As a matter of fact, I’d say we even ratcheted it up in terms of our commitment to reps in 1968 with the development of the Apollo valve. I can’t imagine going to market any other way. I see some other companies that use direct factory personnel and regional managers, but independent reps work best for us.”

Mosack points to the relationships that Conbraco has developed and strengthened over the years as indicative of the commitment his company has for reps. “Off the top of my head I can think of highly successful second- and third-generation rep firms in New England that have been with us for more than 50 years. There’s another firm in Michigan that’s also been with us for more than half a century. What this means is that we don’t make many changes. We’re loyal to the reps we work with and we see to it that they’re compensated well. In re-

turn, I’d say that we’re a demanding principal in that we require a lot of time from our reps with end users and distributors. But the result is that with more than two-thirds of our reps, we represent the majority of their income.”

Just as with BETE Fog Nozzle, the need to replace or find new reps is relatively rare. On those occasions when the company has to fill a void in terms of finding representation, Mosack explains that the company’s contacts serve them well. “We don’t use headhunters to find reps. Rather, we depend on the people we know in the industry, whether that means customers, distributors, end users, or even competitors. Remember, we’ve been around for a long time, and we have a lot of contacts. If we’re going to make a change, it won’t take long for us to make contact with the rep we ultimately want to work with.”

When that contact is made, Mosack emphasizes the importance of “image” when he decides which reps he’ll ultimately go to market with. “The rep is an extension of our company. They are family to us. That’s why any rep we work with has to embody the

same image we do. When I use the word ‘image,’ I’m referring to the professionalism and sense of ethics that we’re comfortable with.”

Once the rep and Conbraco line up with each other, the manufacturer offers a full range of support that allows him to maximize his performance in the field. “We provide them with a full complement of great marketing literature and co-op programs with distributors and customers. We also provide a great deal of product training either here at the factory or out in the field.”

The Importance of Communication

Just as Matthew Bete touts the benefits of a full range of communication between the manufacturer and the rep, Mosack notes, “We’re believers in constant communication with the rep. We accomplish that by the normal methods of phone, fax and e-mail. We’ll also travel with them in the field and find out firsthand what their problems and concerns are.”

Finally, as he’s asked to evaluate the overall relationship between manufacturer and rep, Mosack emphasizes, “For us to have an unworkable relationship with our reps is really unimaginable. We have confidence and trust in our reps. We work well with them and get the best out of them by providing them with the tools they need. It obviously works for both of us.” □

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