



PTRA President Promotes Association Participation

Chris Brisbane, CPMR, points to his membership in PTRA as one of the major factors allowing his agency to successfully negotiate changes that have occurred not only to the industries he serves but to the rep profession in general.

Brisbane, Brisbane Industrial Drive Company, Inc., Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, takes over as president of PTRA at the association's annual meeting next month. He explains that his father started the agency in 1978 and joined PTRA the next year. "Over the years," he notes, "I've developed a keen appreciation for the level of professionalism that the association's members possess. That professionalism is exhibited in every aspect of running their businesses, whether it's the way they promote themselves or the steps they take when representing their principals and dealing with customers. Added to that, everyone believes in and lives by the association code of ethics. When I consider the members who actively participate in PTRA activities, I can't name a single non-member company that operates at the same high level. At the end of the day, I'd have to say that all PTRA members 'walk the walk.'"

Brisbane continues that PTRA has provided his agency with a high level of exposure and networking opportunities over the years. "We're constantly learning from other reps and allied members. What we learn doesn't have to come from companies in the industries we serve. For instance, consider the bear-

ings manufacturers and reps. We don't serve those industries, but through our contacts we do receive a constant stream of ideas and strategies on how to integrate new products into our portfolios and how to work more closely with our customers. This is another example of how PTRA is truly of value to us."

If the association has been a value to Brisbane Industrial Drive, Brisbane continues that communicating that value to existing and prospective members remains a challenge for the association. "One of the problems we and other associations have is convincing the membership that there is a real value in not only joining but in participating. Personally, we've

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had a history of getting involved in various association committees. We've worked our way through the various association positions, whether it means serving on committees, the board or executive committee. My experience has been that the reps and allied members who take the time to get involved and exert their influence truly get more out of the experience. Once a member takes the step to get involved, it's my belief that they'll realize 10 times the benefits compared to whatever it has cost them to belong."

He adds that as he and his agency worked their way through the past recession and accompanying business downturn, "We may have cut back in some areas, but certainly not by ignoring PTRAs. I'll admit we may have sent only two people to a meeting where we sent four in the past. Now that we've grown out of the recession and experienced the results of a positive economy, we'll be sending more people to various activities."

What CPMR Means

Perhaps second in importance to joining PTRAs, according to the new PTRAs president, is the fact that he and his brother (Craig) were the first two members of the association to achieve CPMR status. According to Brisbane, "Our father nudged us in the direction of gaining the CPMR designation over a three-year period. That we were able to accomplish that is a tribute to his foresight."

More than just having four letters appear after his name, Brisbane notes that the MRERF-administered rep educational program "has been a tremendous learning and networking tool. It's provided me with the opportunity to meet many other very successful reps. In the course of meeting them I've learned in a hurry that they had the same problems and concerns I did, regardless of their size or the industries they served. They were faced with having the same ratio of commission to sales dollars, having the necessary time out on the street with customers, and developing strategies to properly pay their salesmen. In addition, they had to learn how to run their businesses. In other words, across all industries, we had more in common than I would have ever imagined."

He continues, "I strongly believe in the benefits of CPMR and I know any and all reps could benefit from it. I'm very fortunate to have a very productive rep organization and have colleagues who have earned the CPMR designation. I think that causes my prin-

cipals to recognize the fact that we have a quality organization that is made up of quality people."

Beginnings as a Rep

Brisbane has nearly three decades experience under his belt to develop his beliefs on the benefits of PTRAs and CPMR. "I've been a rep for 27 years. I joined the agency when I was still in college, providing my father with 'cheap labor' while I earned a BS in business administration and economics."

With that as his beginning in the world of "reptom," Brisbane has seen his agency grow to the point where today it has five salespeople, including himself, covering a rather diverse marketplace that covers eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, New York City and Long Island.

"The single largest part — approximately 50 per-

The PTRAs File

Founded in 1972, the Power-Motion Technology Representatives Association (PTRAs) serves the needs of the independent manufacturers' representative and principals in the power transmission and motion control industries.

Membership: 150 independent manufacturers' representatives and 50 manufacturer associate members.

Web site: www.ptra.org

Executive Director: Jay Ownby

Headquarters: Lake Forest, California

Goals are to:

- Optimize the value of independent sales representatives.
- Optimize the value of the rep-principal relationship.
- Safeguard the integrity of the independent manufacturers' rep profession within the power transmission and motion control industries.
- Enhance the professionalism of members.
- Operate a stable association.

Services: Among the benefits that accompany membership in PTRAs are the association's annual conference each spring, continuing educational opportunities, a quarterly newsletter, access to PTRAs counsel, sample sales representation contracts, and on-going legislative advocacy.

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cent — of our customer base is composed of industrial distribution,” he explains. In addition we work with some catalog houses involved in national distribution. The strength of our distributor business remains the fact that they are family owned, local, independent distributors. We’ve been able to develop very strong relationships with them over the years.” In addition, the agency works with some factory direct sales and some OEMs where “we integrate our machine products into their products.”

Change is Constant

As the agency has grown to where it is today, Brisbane admits that he’s seen and endured many changes over the years. “I think perhaps the major change we’ve experienced has been with the configuration of our company. We’ve grown into a full-service rep agency for our manufacturers and our

customers. Our inside staff provides customer service to our customer base and we’ve added any number of other services to what we historically have offered the marketplace.

“But if that’s how we’ve changed, perhaps the biggest change I’ve seen with our customers is the impact of downsizing. As a result of them downscaling what they do, we’ve been forced into providing more services, including engineering.”

Does he expect change to be as constant in the future as it has been in the past? Brisbane is quick to offer, “If you come back and visit us in as short a time as five years, our entire organization will have changed. Driving that change will be advances in communication technology. We’re already trying to get comfortable with what the future might hold. For instance, this Christmas everyone was given a BlackBerry communication device. In general, however, I don’t think we’re going to be jumping in our cars and driving from point A to point B to customer locations to meet their needs. As we look at advances in conference call and digital communication technology, I think we’ll find other ways we’re going to be in contact with customers. Hopefully we’ll have all the tools we need for the future before our competition does.”

Brisbane’s commitment to recognize and then meet the needs of the future can best be found in his agency’s motto to customers, which reads: “In this contemporary climate of hyper-competition our motto is: ‘No longer should you accept three strikes and you’re out, we operate under the philosophy: One strike and you’re invisible.’” □

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