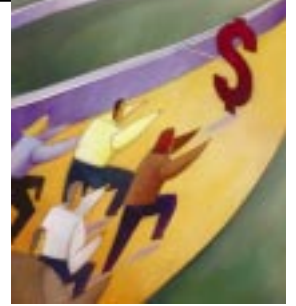
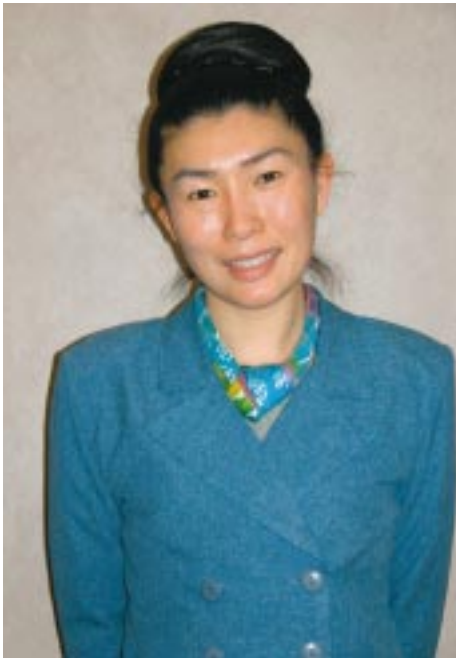


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# Training In The Mix As Manufacturer Builds Rep Force Training



Among the stops that Catherine Zhou has made in her career before arriving at Innotex Global Services was a stay with a machining company. Her tenure there educated her to the efficiencies of working with independent manufacturers' representatives and — with the additional knowledge she gained by attending a MANA Manufacturer Seminar — she hasn't forgotten the lessons she learned.



*Catherine Zhou*

**T**oday Zhou is charged with building an independent manufacturers' rep network for the Franklin, Tennessee-based manufacturer, Innotex Global Services, who provides China offshore outsourcing and contract manufacturing services from its factories in China.

Zhou notes that the majority (80 percent) of her company's product offerings is manufactured in China. Many of the imaging products the company produces can be found on the shelves of stores such as Office Depot and Wal-Mart.

Zhou points to the importance of working with manufacturers' representatives as a way for the manufacturer to stay focused on its core competencies. "Obviously, we possess the complete spectrum of abilities when it comes to manufacturing. But it's the independent manufacturers' reps who are the ones who truly

understand what's going on in the marketplace. Among the many attributes the rep possesses are the strong relationships with customers and the professionalism they exhibit in the territory.

"I've learned that you can locate professional reps in all market segments, and working with them is a much better idea than trying to do it on your own. We keep in mind the fact that the rep is the one who has developed the solid relationships with customers and the knowledge of the customer's needs. No one serves as an intermediary between us and the customer as well as the rep can."

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## Following a Path to Rep Success

As she's in the midst of putting her rep team together, Zhou explains that she's incorporated a five-stage process in her company's

marketing plan for 2006. Included in the plan are:

- Rep training.
- Co-marketing with reps.
- Joint sales calls with reps.
- Preparation work — “Among the many steps we’ll take in this stage is the placing of an ad on the MANA web site (www.MANAonline.org) indicating our desire to locate and work with reps. We’ll also use the MANA database in our search for prospective reps. Once we locate prospects, we’ll be completing e-mail and direct contact with prospects. At the end of this stage we plan cold calls to reps who might make a good match for us.”

- Building a rep-support team — “The rep’s support team that I’m speaking about includes what I would call our ‘on shore’ team of support staff; e.g., customer service, business development and engineering staff. We’re putting together people who are very experienced and can easily interact with customers and our team of reps.”

Just as other manufacturers voice concern with getting enough of the reps’ time in the field, Zhou indicates that that’s especially important for a manufacturer such as Innotex that has its manufacturing base half a world away. “We’ve identified at least three areas that we’re going to concentrate on when it comes to getting and keeping the reps interested in us,” she says. “As I’ve already mentioned, the first thing we want to do is to get that rep-support team in place. We feel that’s important because we know how important it is for reps to feel comfortable working with us. Included on that team will be

***“Obviously, we possess the complete spectrum of abilities when it comes to manufacturing. But it’s the independent manufacturers’ reps who are the ones who truly understand what’s going on in the marketplace.”***

people from sales, engineering and the supply side.

“The second thing we’ll concentrate on is our co-marketing efforts. If our reps exhibit a desire and willingness to undertake advertising campaigns, for instance, we’ll be sure to be there to co-advertise with them. That’s an important area where we can show our support — that, and participating in ventures such as trade shows.

“And finally, we will have a strong rep training program in place. Since our reps will be our intermediaries here in the United States, we know how important it is to learn all they can about us and our products. We’d even like to invite them to our factories in China so they can make the contacts they need there and learn firsthand how we operate.”

#### **Addressing Rep Concerns**

Trips to factories in China remain an important element in the formula to effectively work with reps, according to Zhou. “Personally seeing how things are done can do a lot to strengthen our relationship with reps,” she says. “I think there are two areas reps — or any business new to working with manufacturers located in China — are concerned about, and they are intellectual property

and quality control in the manufacturing process. We’ve addressed both of these issues and communicate our efforts to both our reps and customers.”

On the subject of intellectual property (IP), Zhou indicates the history of American firms working with suppliers in China is replete with horror stories involving patent infringement and other problems. “We’ve taken the step to hire patent attorneys in China to ensure that all rules and regulations are complied with and that our customers’ best interests are protected.”

When it comes to quality concerns, Zhou notes that problems in this area develop when product samples arrive in the United

***“If our reps exhibit a desire and willingness to undertake advertising campaigns ... we’ll be sure to be there to co-advertise with them. That’s an important area where we can show our support — that, and participating in ventures such as trade shows.”***

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States and everything looks fine — but once product shipments arrive, it's a different story. “You never know what you're going to get in that box of chocolates,” she says. To combat quality concerns, Zhou explains that factories have achieved ISO accreditation and other quality programs are in place that monitor systems stabil-

ity and ensure the quality of the products being shipped overseas.

Zhou continues that manufacturing in China, combined with their desire to sell products in the United States and other countries, serves as just another example of the globalization trend that continues to have such an impact on U.S. businesses today. To that end, she notes that in addition to her work with building the manufacturers' rep network in this country, she also can aid reps and other businesses that are interested in establishing business in mainland China via her connection with Global Development Partners (GdP). According to Zhou, “It's critically important

for reps and other businesspeople who are interested in building relationships in China to be aware of who the right people are. It's in that area that we can help. If the rep wants to enter the Chinese market or to source from China, they can locate a wealth of information by visiting [www.globaldp.com](http://www.globaldp.com).”

Among other forms of information, visitors to that site will find how to access reports on a variety of markets including pharmaceutical, consumer goods, automotive, technology and media, and heavy industry. The site also provides assistance in the areas of procurement, market entry and manufacturing assistance. □

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