
CPMR Spells Success For Reps And Manufacturers

A question concerning rep training that was asked of manufacturers selling through independent manufacturers' representatives elicited a mixed response. The question was, "Does the CPMR designation following a rep's name carry any special significance for you?"

While not all manufacturers were familiar with the MRERF-administered educational program, the majority of those queried from the industries served by PTRA, AIM/R and especially NEMRA professed a knowledge and a keen appreciation for the program and for the reps who have completed it.

In fact, for a number of electrical manufacturers, the letters CPMR spell "success" and "professionalism." And if that's the case, then independent manufacturers' representatives in all industries had better take heed.

For those not in the know, CPMR is short for Certified Professional Manufacturers' Representative. More to the point, CPMR stands for the program created especially for manufacturers' representatives and brokers after nearly a decade of research and development, and with the cooperation of a variety of representatives' trade groups — including NEMRA. To become a

CPMR, each candidate must attend three levels of on-campus classes, totaling 24 hours at each level of study. The entire curriculum can take between three to five years to complete. More than 1,500 manufacturers' representatives already have earned the CPMR designation, and hundreds more are currently enrolled in the program. The program is administered by the Manufacturers' Representatives Educational Research Foundation (MRERF).

Worth the Effort?

Is it worth the time, money and expense? That's a question posed to several electrical manufacturers, and the answer that came back was a resounding "Yes." Electrical manufacturers know what CPMR stands for, they understand the work needed to achieve the designation, and they appreciate the fact that the individual rep has exhibited a willingness to re-invest in himself.

Manufacturers also note that more than just four being letters after a rep's name, CPMR spells out the fact that the individual is a "professional," and he's a person who has seen the value in raising the bar of his personal and his profession's performance.

The level of appreciation for what CPMR means is gleaned from conversations with a number of electrical manufacturers.

At the outset, Bob Smith admits he wishes more electrical reps would appreciate the significance of earning the CPMR. Smith, who was a speaker at the first *Keystone Conference*, is the

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executive vice president, sales and marketing, for Pass & Seymour/Legrand, Syracuse, New York. “Most of the very good reps understand how important CPMR is,” he maintains, “but more have to take advantage of this valuable educational opportunity.”

Smith notes that Pass & Seymour looks at CPMR in a three-pronged manner:

- “First, whenever we need a rep for a territory, the fact that he has the CPMR designation is very important to us.
- “Next, at our annual sales meeting, we always acknowledge those reps that are currently enrolled in the program or have already earned their CPMR.
- “Finally, when it comes right down to it and if all the elements of competing rep firms were fairly equal, the CPMR designation could very well tip the scales in the direction of the agency that had people on board who have successfully completed the program.”

In addition, Smith and his company put great stock in the line profitability analysis aspect of the CPMR curriculum. “For those reps who regularly note which of their lines bring them a return on their effort, that’s exactly what the manufacturer is looking for. It shows a level of professional-

ism and dedication to the profession that brings real strength to the relationship between manufacturer and rep.”

An Inventory of Qualities

“When interviewing a prospective rep, if there was an inventory of 10 essentials that an electrical rep must possess, then having the CPMR designation would be a deal-sealer for me,” explains Gary Norris, vice president, distribution marketing and sales, Ilsco, Cincinnati, Ohio. “I know what the program entails, and to me it means the rep is seriously committed to investing his personal time into improving himself and his business. CPMR certainly differentiates the rep who has it from those who have not earned that level of professionalism.”

Norris continues that as “I conduct interviews with reps, there are obviously a number of characteristics that will impact the ultimate selection process. While I’ll admit that CPMR is only one of those characteristics, it is one of the characteristics that would be important in our extending an offer.”

Having said that, he emphasizes how important it was also for a rep to have a known name and exhibit a high level of performance in his territory. “CPMR alone wouldn’t be sufficient for us to make an offer.”

Dave Burnette, national sales manager, Electrical Division, Wheatland Tube Company, Collingswood, New Jersey, notes that “while I can’t say not having CPMR is a deal breaker, I’ll go so far as to admit that based on our experience, we’re becoming more and more aware of the importance of the designation. Having it is

becoming more important in the selection process.”

When asked if all things were equal among reps competing for the line, would CPMR tip the scales in favor of one or the other, Burnette is quick to answer: “Sure it would make a difference, but I’ve got to add that I’ve never seen all things being equal.”

Here’s what he has seen, however: “I’ve noticed in just the last couple of years where the value of the CPMR training is starting to become more visible and the actions that reps are taking grow out of that training. I’m sure all of this was going on in the background previously, but I’m seeing more of it today. For instance, I’m beginning to see some of my agents expand territories, something they weren’t necessarily doing before. Also, I’ve become aware of the value of line profitability analysis. We’ve seen some reps drop some pretty big lines even though they were the rep’s second or third line.

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Checking the Rep’s Resumé

“I look at the CPMR designation as a point of differentiation on a rep’s resumé,” says Rick Angel, senior vice president at Lutron Electronics Company, Inc. “It is indicative of a dedication to the profession, and a willingness to stay current and connected with the trade,” he continues.

“When reps are looking to expand, or to form relationships with new manufacturers, it is important that they take a critical look at their resumé to ensure

that it quickly and clearly identifies their skill sets and successes at a glance. The CPMR designation can help to fill a void in their background; help to give them that extra boost in competitive situations.”

Angel is quick to point out that a professional title will not override proven success running an agency, a strong manufacturing background, or tangible evidence that a rep effectively increased sales through other job experiences. “A CPMR certification can help to tip the scales toward one rep candidate vs. another when all else is equal, but it is not absolutely necessary for a successful agency,” he maintains.

If Angel looks at CPMR as a point to consider on a rep’s resumé, then Bob Bukowsky looks at it as a type of degree. According to Bukowsky, vice president of sales, IDEAL Industries, Inc., Sycamore, Illinois, “It shows the reps’ dedication to themselves, their profession and to their industry. What I’m looking for in a rep is performance, and the rep with CPMR has taken the steps to ensure he’ll be a top performer.”

He continues that reps who undertake the CPMR program show a “dedication to the industry and a certain spirit regarding the professional aspects of being a great rep. It means they’re will-

ing to take the time to invest in themselves. They can be proud of what they’ve accomplished.”

Larry Fisher looks at the MRERF CPMR program from a unique dual perspective. Fisher is the electrical division manager for Erico Inc., Solon, Ohio, where a part of his job is to work with independent electrical manufacturers’ representatives. In addition, he’s spent four years in the classroom as an instructor in the program.

Committing to the Long Haul

“Achieving the CPMR designation says that the rep is in it for the long haul,” he maintains. “They’ve made the effort to invest their time, money and personnel to improve their profession.” Strictly from his position as a manufacturer, he adds, “We’re all operating under a tremendous number of time constraints. Acknowledging that fact, it’s much easier for a manufacturer’s regional manager to work with reps that adhere to sound business practices, state-of-the-art technology and who manage their agencies in a professional manner. The worst scenario for a manufacturer is to have to deal with a rep agency that is difficult to communicate with and makes a lot of mistakes. They might very well be good salespeople, but if they don’t

run their businesses properly, the problems can be insurmountable.”

While emphasizing the importance of CPMR for all reps, Fisher notes that “any rep going through transition — merger, consolidation or sale of the firm — needs the information contained in the program.”

He concludes by saying that the “predominance of CPMR among reps in the electrical channel says something very positive about the industry we work in. We, meaning NEMRA, manufacturers and reps, promote the program, talk about it and feature its benefits in our various seminars and other programs.”

Finally, from her perspective as the executive vice president of MRERF, Marilyn Friesen agrees with much of what these electrical manufacturers have had to say. “My take on the manufacturer views,” she offers, “is that they are obviously aware of the program and its benefits. Furthermore, they support it as one of the tools used for making a final decision in the retention/hiring of an agency.”

She continues that reps who achieve the CPMR designation know that they represent principals who are aware that they make the commitment for CPMR “not as a requirement of the job; but rather it is something they truly want to do in order to successfully conduct business in the electrical industry. Yes, the training the rep receives (e.g., line profitability analysis) may cause him to scrutinize or even give up what appears to be a good line, but it’s obvious they’ve learned how to make choices concerning just how ‘professional’ they want to be, and they conduct themselves accordingly.” □

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