
Consumer Products Reps *Join Forces* With MANA

The decision by NAGMR to avail itself of services made available by MANA does more than create a desired synergy between the two associations.

According to Ron Otto, president of the National Association of General Merchandise Representatives (NAGMR), the decision to work with MANA firmly positions his organization to expand the menu of services for its members while providing opportunities to grow the association's membership.

For those unfamiliar with the association, NAGMR "is a professional association of consumer product brokers representing leading manufacturers to the food, drug and mass merchandise trade. NAGMR brokers are sales specialists in health & beauty aids, cosmetics, general merchandise and food products, with special expertise in over-the-counter (OTC) and drug-related products."

Otto explains that NAGMR members work with the manufacturers of consumer packaged goods, most of whom have the goal of conducting business with the major chains in this country. "Approximately 10 chain store operations control the more than 35,000 stores that sell these goods," he says. "Those chains control about 90 percent of the business."

More detailed information concerning the association may be found at www.nagmr.org. In addition, since the NAGMR membership is comprised of a constituency that may be slightly different from other rep associations, it might be worthwhile to visit the web sites for some of the association's members. For instance:

- National Sales Solutions, LLC:
www.nationalsalesolutions.com
- Elias Shaker & Company:
www.eliasshaker.com

- Morgan & Sampson USA:
www.morgansampsonusa.com

When the announcement was made that NAGMR was the third industry-specific rep association to avail itself of MANA's services, MANA President Joe Miller commented, "We think the benefits to both NAGMR and MANA are substantial and quite clear." Agreeing with him was Otto, who noted, "The alliance with MANA gives us the best of both worlds. We have the advantage of being small and quick to react, as well as the benefits of being allied with a major champion of the rep/broker profession. We expect to see NAGMR membership and member benefits both grow immediately as a result of this decision."

Joint Agreement

The agreement between the two associations calls for the members and board of directors of NAGMR to continue to make all their strategic and tactical decisions as they have in the past.

Otto, president of NAGMR-member firm National Sales Solutions, LLC, St. Louis, Missouri, explains the organization was founded in 1948 by a group of representatives and brokers who "wanted to foster networking and encourage education among its mem-

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bers.” At its height, NAGMR had close to 200 members. Its membership today is approximately 30. That drop in membership, coupled with the desire to provide added services, was among the compelling reasons NAGMR and MANA joined forces.

“When I was approached to serve as the association president for this year,” explains Otto, “I said I’d do it, but my goal was to dedicate my time to locating a partner for the association that would help us grow and to provide something of value to our members. We found that partner in MANA.

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Among the benefits he cited that were valuable to NAGMR members was that of the ability to network. “Our members, just as reps in other industries, can be fairly lonely. Our members deal with retailers who usually aren’t their social friends. I don’t know how many NAGMR members would say that networking is important, but the fact is, it is important. I know that speaking for myself, I always keep an eye out for my fellow members, whether it’s just forwarding some important information to them or alerting them to an opportunity. We felt that this was something MANA could help with.”

While the networking might be considered of prime importance, right behind it, in the view of Otto, was the desire to grow business — and this was also something an alliance with MANA would help with. “There are so many manufacturers serving our industry that are constantly looking for agents,” explains Otto. “The problem currently is that if you do an Internet search, it’s very difficult to locate consumer products brokers. Sure, you can find real es-

tate and other sorts of agents, but you won’t necessarily find us.” He continues that his agency, National Sales Solutions, is fortunate in that it regularly receives a large number of queries from prospective principals. “When I ask them how they found us, they’ll generally answer that it’s through one of the other organizations that we belong to. That’s what I want to accomplish for NAGMR, and that’s one of the things we can accomplish through our alliance with MANA. Manufacturers will be able to easily visit the MANA web site, set their parameters and locate agents that meet their needs.”

Taking Advantage of Resources

Seconding the notion that an agreement between MANA and NAGMR would benefit both organizations is Bruce Funk, Elias Shaker & Co., Arlington Heights, Illinois. Funk, who was the organization’s president last year and still sits on its board, notes that his agency was one of the founding companies of NAGMR. “In a perfect world,” he maintains, “there would be a wealth of resources we could make available to our members. That’s what we’re looking to offer through our agreement with MANA.”

Looking back at the history of NAGMR, Funk explains, “In its heyday, NAGMR was a vibrant organization that was great for networking. Manufacturers could find agents, and agents could meet with their existing and potential principals. Given all that’s changed in the industry over the years (e.g., industry consolidation), we now have to look at things differently. In searching for an organization we could partner with, MANA was ideal. We’re going to maintain our individual identity and decision-making ability while gaining strength in being able to promote the rep way of going to market. That’s one of the key ingredients that MANA provides.”

Both men agree that the number-one challenge NAGMR and their partner MANA face in making this agreement work is their ability to grow the membership. As Funk explains, “We want to ensure that we’re not viewed as just a place for members to send a check. Our goal is to provide the value they’re looking for.” Funk knows what he’s talking about, since he recognized the value MANA provides by joining the association prior to the agreement with NAGMR. “One of the major reasons I joined MANA was that I was aware of the benefits that come with belonging to a larger organization. MANA has proven its value over the long haul.” □