

Hardware Manufacturer Relies On Reps

More than 20 years ago, the A.L. Hansen Company found its business increasing at such a pace that there was no way the company's direct sales force could keep up. It was then that the manufacturer of commercial vehicle and industrial hardware turned to manufacturers' representatives to manage the increased sales and instantly provide them with more "feet on the street." The business partnership worked so well that it remains intact today and has resulted in the company's being added to the growing list of Agency Sales "Perfect Principals."

According to Dan Davis, Vehicle Equipment Company, Inc., Dallas, Texas, "We've represented the company since 1997. Over that period of time we've visited the factory a number of times for various sales schools. They also have supported us with joint field visits to customers, as well as participation in trade shows."

Constant Flow of Communication

High on the list of characteristics that Davis covers when speaking about his principal are the company's willingness to constantly provide feedback, and in general keep the lines of communication wide open. "They've always honored our time and are more than willing to provide us with all we need to know con-



Left to right: Richard Garrigus, Joyce Opp and Dan Davis of Vehicle Equipment Company, Inc.

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.
- **Leonard Valve Company**, Cranston, Rhode Island. Products: A full line of water mixing valves and water temperature controls for commercial, institutional and industrial applications.
- **A.L. Hansen Mfg., Co., Inc.**, Waukegan, Illinois. Products: Commercial vehicle and industrial hardware.

“They’ve always honored our time and are more than willing to provide us with all we need to know concerning what’s going on with the company including new product information.”

cerning what’s going on with the company, including new product information. Mainly what I’m speaking about is their dedication to feedback. As the rep, it’s our job to meet with customers and develop the business. It’s then that A.L. Hansen does all it can when it comes to providing us with the answers we need to get the job done. That includes engineering support and any feedback needed on quotes, delivery, etc. It’s the support they provide us that allows us to differentiate ourselves in the marketplace.”

While citing the benefits of the frequent joint sales calls, Davis explains that the most prevalent means of communication between his agency and the principal remains voice mail, e-mail and personal phone calls. “We’re

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probably more proactive than others when it comes to staying in touch with our principals. It’s hardly busywork; rather, when we start on a project, we find that there are always myriad details along the way that the manufacturer ought to be apprised of. We’ve always practiced the philosophy of being proactive with our communication. It’s just a part of the way we manage the deal.”

Reps Provide “Feet on the Street”

Centrally located in Waukegan, Illinois, the 86-year-old A.L. Hansen Mfg. Company, Inc., is owned and managed by William and Justin Hansen, grandsons of the founder.

Looking back to 1985, when the company first started using manufacturers’ representatives, Patti Smith, sales manager, explains, “Our sales were going absolutely crazy at that time. We needed outside sources to handle the business, and that’s when reps came on board. In addition to providing us with the additional support we needed in the field, we’ve also looked at — and continue to do so today — the cost of a direct sales force vs. manu-

facturers’ reps. We continue to believe reps are the way to go.”

Just as Davis emphasized the importance of constant communication between his agency and the manufacturer, so too does Smith point to the importance of staying in touch. “If anything, I think communication remains the number-one challenge between us and our reps. We know that when the rep meets with a customer, there’s a great deal of information that’s important to share with us. Likewise, we have details on new equipment, products or new procedures in the company that we should be sharing with them.” To assist in meeting that challenge, she explains that the company is looking into a new software system that will tie together all information and reports needed to maximize the relationship between rep and manufacturers.

In addition to the importance of relying on traditional means of communication, Smith also explains that she and her company are advocates for joint sales calls. “I’ve been with the company for 21 years, and the joint calls I make allow me to spot new business opportunities that might normally be missed.” Smith travels with reps about every other week and notes that reps are notified well in advance and operate under a planned itinerary during her visits.

In addition to the joint sales calls, A.L. Hansen supports its reps via qualified sales leads, participation in trade shows and the on-going support of company engineers, some of whom travel with Smith when she makes joint sales calls.

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