
This Manufacturer “Gets It”

Two executives with MANA-member Aquest Corporation provided the perfect words of praise earlier this year when they singled out one of their principals — Micro Air Corporation — as a “Perfect Principal.” As a result, this month the Wichita, Kansas-based manufacturer of a full line of industrial air cleaners, dust collectors, clean air booths, environmental booths, downdraft tables and commercial air cleaners joins our ever-growing list of manufacturers that their reps are proud to work with.

In presenting its “Quality Manufacturer of the Year Award” to Micro Air, Phil Roland, Aquest president, said, “Micro Air truly exemplifies the best in the dealer/distributor sales arena. Simply stated, they ‘get it.’ They have:

- Developed leading-edge Internet lead generation programs.
- Implemented ‘old school’ direct mail.
- Conducted case study reports.

“Micro Air teams up with their reps to encourage a winning attitude throughout the organization.

“How many principals in today’s competitive market have forgotten tried-and-true business principles or sound sales and marketing practices? Inside technical sales support is vital to the success of any field sales rep — and that’s what they provide. Someone has to be there to ‘answer the

phone.’ When an order requires an expedited delivery, when a custom feature is required, if the paint color is needed to match the flagship colors of Harley Davidson, Micro Air delivers. Instead of saying, ‘Why are you asking?’ their response is, ‘What can we do to get the order?’”

Adding his perspective was Steve Maclachlan, Aquest vice president of sales, who said, “When the competition is fierce and the customer is demanding, you want a principal that will stand up to its principles. Micro

Air makes you want to get out the door and sell their features, functions and benefits.”

Roland concluded his presentation to the manufacturer by saying, “In more than 16 years of sales and service of industrial capital equipment, we have never had the quality support that has been provided by Micro Air. Our sales have increased each year, and we look forward to a long-standing and mutually beneficial business relationship with the entire Micro Air team for years to come. Micro Air has worked



Wendy Layton and Jim Orr, both of Micro Air Corporation, were recognized by MANA-member Aquest Corporation, as the rep firm's “Quality Manufacturer of the Year.”

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.
- **Micro Air Corporation**, Wichita, Kansas. Products: Full line of industrial air cleaners, dust collectors, clean air booths, environmental booths, downdraft tables and commercial air cleaners.

hard to establish a partnership with their entire dealer/distributor network."

In an interview with *Agency Sales*, Roland explained that his relationship with Micro Air began about four years ago when the manufacturer contacted Aquest. "They probably learned about us from our reputation," he said. Aquest, Somers, Connecticut, provides a full range of high-quality and proven technologies that condition, filter and clean process air streams, improve indoor air quality and meet stringent environmental emissions standards.

Moving Up Quickly on the Line Card

"We were naturally interested in them because over the years we had gone through several different dust collector companies, all with a very poor success rate. I'd say in most of the cases that it was a poor marriage between us and the manufacturers." Since Aquest didn't have that line of products at the time, they took it on, and in a relatively short period of time it went from nothing to near the top of the agency's line card.

One of the key ingredients in what is certainly a professional relationship, according to Roland, is the communication between the manufacturer and the rep and from the rep to the manufacturer. "If I had to describe their philosophy of communication, I'd call them aggressive," he explained. "Their e-mail communications to us are superb. Any orders that we enter are sent through e-mail. The same can be said for their acknowledgements, order release and shipment schedules."

Then, according to Roland, there is that old standby commu-

nication tool — the telephone. "There are a lot of companies today that believe the Internet is the panacea for all ills. As I look back on the more than 30 years I've spent in sales, we've abandoned a lot of our 'old-school' practices. Not Micro Air. They'll use the phone to communicate to us with regularity, and they expect the same from us. They haven't forgotten that sales success has been built on relationships, and if nothing else, hearing someone's voice on the other end of the phone does a lot to maintain those relationships. Most of their people will be on the phone with us daily."

When it comes to the type of frequency of communication that the principal wants/expects from Aquest, Roland takes a moment to describe his philosophy — and it seems to be one that meshes quite well with what Micro Air expects. "Here's the way a principal should monitor or measure his reps: Are they calling us? How often do we hear from them? What are we learning from the field?"

"On the other hand, if a principal is bogging down his reps with paperwork and reports, the salesman isn't free to be out in the field getting orders. What results is some sort of a 'police state' that is worthy of no one. Every day I let Micro Air know what's happening in the territory."

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In summation, Roland explains that Micro Air "is totally focused — from the top down — on the success of its rep network. They provide all the tools we'll need to be successful, whether it's inside sales support, pricing books, direct-mail programs or educational CDs. These folks are the real deal. They have a passion for what they do and they communicate that passion to their reps."

Reps Make Sense

That passion for conducting business with and through manufacturers' representatives is evident in a conversation with Micro Air's national sales manager Jim Orr, who has been with the company for 13 years. Orr explains that reps make economic sense.

"We've got to do all we can to maintain their mind share. To accomplish that task we service the heck out of them, whether that means lead generation, providing inside sales support or just by being there to answer their questions whenever needed."

“We work with 40–45 reps throughout the country and Canada, and they provide us with an instant presence in the territory. In addition to that immediate start in the field, consider for a moment how difficult it would be for a company like us to locate and hire 40–45 direct salespeople — and then provide them with all the support they’ll need. That’s why reps are so effective. They arrive on the scene with the needed sales organization and support, not to mention their ‘gung-ho’ attitude.”

The benefits don’t end there,

however, according to Orr. “Then there’s the attribute reps possess with their synergistic sales offering. The direct salesperson is only representing one line. The rep, on the other hand, has the multiple product offering that makes him that much more valuable, not only to his principals, but also to his customers.”

Orr admits that one of the challenges he and his company face in working with their reps is always to be uppermost in the rep’s mind. “We’ve got to do all we can to maintain their mind share. To accomplish that task we service

the heck out of them, whether that means lead generation, providing inside sales support or just by being there to answer their questions whenever needed.”

When asked for his reaction to the kind words uttered previously by Roland, Orr offers that “Quite honestly, that’s just a result of the fact that we listen to our reps. Some people — not us — forget that the rep is our customer. At the same time, since they are independent businesses, you can’t dictate to them how to run their businesses. We always keep that in mind in our relations with them.” □

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