
Rep And Manufacturer Working Off The Same Page

If there were ever a principal and a manufacturers' representative that are reading and working off the same page, it would appear that Genesee Stamping and Fabricating, Inc., and Premier Components, Inc., are the two.



Here's how George Naseef, sales manager for Genesee Stamping, Grand Prairie, Texas, introduced us to the two companies and their relationship: "We've been using manufacturers' reps since our inception, dating back to 1978. I wish to recommend Premier Components as the perfect rep agency.

"This group was founded by Lane Burnett in 1982, and we've been working with them since that time. Aside from the general wants and needs of any principal and rep agency in terms of territory coverage, this agency goes the extra mile every day."

As to how the agency works that "extra mile," Naseef continues, "For example, we participated in a trade show in Austin, Texas, last year. Located right across the aisle from us was one of our primary competitors. They do not have representation in this area and they were amazed at the foot travel that bypassed their booth and came straight to our booth because of the business and professional dealings with Lane Burnett."

And that's not all. Two years ago, according to Naseef, "When our business was growing steadily, we felt it was time to contact Premier and suggest

Top: Dan Fergus (left), president of Genesee Stamping and Fabricating, Inc., and George Naseef (right) present a plaque to Lane Burnett (center) for 27 years of service as a representative for Genesee Stamping.

Middle (front row, left to right): The owners of Premier Components, Inc., Lane Burnett, Mike Cramer and David Bishop attend a sales meeting at Genesee.

Bottom: The sales representataives, internal sales and estimating personnel at Genesee Stamping.

(strongly) that they add another representative in a key strategic geographic location. Lane didn't hesitate, and in order to take advantage of this upturn in the economy, he started the search process for the right person shortly after our conversation."

Developing a New Account

Naseef wasn't done yet. He continued: "To demonstrate the persistence Premier Components possesses, I'd like to bring up one final example. Both of our organizations have tried for more than 15 years to break into a major account, but to no avail. Mid last year this customer decided to outsource some metal stampings (through the dreaded Internet package, 'bid all, or you will not be considered'). Lane spoke to the buyer and insisted that we be able to quote a select grouping of parts, which would provide the value the customer demanded. To make a long story short, to date we have landed 14 new items with a dollar potential of \$350,000 annually, with more appearing to be on the way.

"I'd say that Premier Components is as close to 'perfect' in all aspects of the total sales package as they come. They are our MANA manufacturer's most perfect rep."

Perhaps a starting point for getting a fix on why this agency has attained such a desirable reputation in the eyes of one of its principals is the agency name — "Premier Components."

Selecting a Name that Fits

According to the agency's web site, "Premier Components, Inc. was established in 1982 to provide representation for the needs of our principals and the OEM marketplace. Our primary objective is to continue to build a sales agency that both our customers and principals consider to be the *premier* sales agency for component parts."

"We carefully select a principal base that meets our customer needs and leads to long-lasting partnerships."

According to Lane Burnett, "Part of our reasoning for selecting that name rested in how people would refer to you. We wanted one word that would provide a connotation that we were the very best agency to deal with. I think we accomplished that with the name we chose and the performance that followed."

From the beginning, the agency and its personnel have dedicated themselves to living up to that name, and they've done it via following three primary steps:

- "First, we cultivate a customer by following through with service and quality so that Premier Components and the companies we represent are thought of first for mechanical and electro-mechanical components."

As an example of this first step, Burnett cites the importance of communication and follow-up. "We work with several customers that see the benefits of channeling information through us. It's not that we request it, it's more that they realize the importance of this type of approach. They feel that if there's something important to communicate to principals, they can make one phone call to us and cover several suppliers at the same time. But we're not done there. We follow up to ensure that their questions are answered and their needs are met. If they haven't received the answer they need, they know that we'll take charge and follow up again until the job is done."

- "Second, we carefully select a principal base that meets our customer needs and leads to long-lasting partnerships." Burnett cites three of its principals, including Genesee Stamping, that have been with the agency for 24 years. "I think one of the contributing factors to our lengthy tenures," he explains, "is the fact that we work to be perceived as a true extension of the companies we represent. To do that, we tend to get involved at a higher level of customer service than the typical rep does. We'll also take steps to monitor activity within our accounts, and generally just go the extra mile for both our principals and our customers."

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• “Third, we assemble the right personnel that can provide a sales and service effort that results in profitable, long-term relationships between Premier, our principals, and our customers.”

To execute this step, Burnett notes, “When seeking additional personnel we’ll depend upon traditional ads in papers, and on the Internet. Then what it comes down to is screening resumes and conducting the needed interviews.”

When asked to comment on Naseef’s request that the agency add another representative in a key strategic geographic location, Burnett says, “The timing of that request couldn’t have been any better. I think it was more than warranted, especially since we were at the point where we were anticipating growing our staff. We tailored our actions to respond to the needs of the principal and everything worked out fine.”

As the agency is presently constituted, Premier Components has three people working out of its Dallas/Fort Worth location; three in the Round Rock location; and one person in Harlingen, Texas.

Additional Issues

With close to a quarter of a century as a manufacturers’ representative under his belt, Burnett admits that he’s well-positioned to offer some of his thoughts on issues that affect him and other reps. Among those subjects are:

• **Challenges** — “In my opinion one of the major challenges we and other reps face today is that of finding additional lines that are first, experienced in dealing with manufacturers’ representatives; and second, lines that can provide us with an income stream.” In order to locate product lines that meet both of those criteria, he explains that the agency “uses an internal questionnaire that focuses on how a manu-

facturer matches up with our needs, how they market, their strengths, weaknesses, etc.” He adds that in the past, Premier Components has had some luck locating new lines via customer recommendations, but that the ads they’ve placed in *Agency Sales* magazine have been of special assistance.

• **Commissions** — The subject of principals chipping away at reps’ commissions is one that’s received attention from Burnett. “There have been occasions when the principal comes in and says that to gain a specific piece of business they’d like us to take a cut in the commission. Sometimes they offer a justification for us taking a cut, other times not. In general, my response has been that we don’t just say ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Instead we want to know what we’re going to get for going along with the cut. In other words, what are you as the principal willing to trade with me to agree to the commission cut? For instance, if we’re willing to take a cut, how about the principal agreeing to sponsor a trade show in the area?”

He continues that by “pushing back a little, we’re not always successful, but what has happened is the more we push back, the fewer times they’ll come to us in the future looking for us to agree to a cut.”

• **Appreciation** — Here’s a subject that Burnett agrees travels a two-way street between the manufacturer and his reps. “On the one hand, we love to hear from our principals how appreciative (other than by commissions) they are with the work we’ve been performing on their behalf. For example, the phone call thanking us for increasing sales or putting in the extra effort on a special project is always remembered.”

On the other hand, one thing that Burnett has come to appreciate in terms of what his principals face is that “each of the reps a principal has to deal with works with a diverse customer base and each of them has their own systems and requirement that the principal has to make work. I truly appreciate how well they operate in terms of keeping their reps and customers satisfied.”

Two additional subjects that Burnett discussed with *Agency Sales* are his agency’s membership in MANA and the fact that he and two others in the agency (Mike Cramer and David Bishop) have achieved MRERF’s CPMR designation.

“Regarding our membership in MANA, when we first joined the association in 1989, the major asset we took advantage of was *Agency Sales* magazine. In the last couple of years, however, the association has jumped on board with its support of the CPMR pro-

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gram, they have local meetings, and we were among the reps who participated in the association's first Study Mission to China."

As for the importance of CPMR, "We felt that since we exerted so much effort in earning the desig-

nation, we had better make sure people learned about it. My feeling is that it separates us from other reps. We use it as a marketing tool for anything we do. The bottom line is that this is another building block for our agency." □

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