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# Taking Stock Of MANA Products And Services

**W**hen manufacturers' representatives and associates join MANA, one of the first benefits they derive from their membership is a three-ring binder that describes many of the products and services that are immediately available to them. The information in that binder is fairly inclusive in terms of what products and services MANA offers to its membership. Given the space available to us in *Agency Sales* magazine, it's difficult if not impossible to describe everything that the binder covers.

According to Dennis Badour, LDME, LLC, Moran, Michigan, an integral part of the success that he and his wife have experienced has been due to the couple's early membership in MANA (see their story on page 9). "Joining the association was one of the smartest things we did," he says. "One of the biggest mistakes we made early on was to let ourselves seem more likely to fall into the trap of having our principals treat us more like employees than independent manufacturers' representatives. We were at the point where we knew we had better find a new direction. If we didn't

change, we'd be out of business in a hurry. When we were looking around to determine who could help us through this situation, MANA stood out like a sore thumb. In talking to MANA staff, we learned about the standard rep contract, found an attorney familiar with rep law, and learned how to best find new principals. In addition, we look forward to receiving *Agency Sales* every month."

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## Meeting Members' Needs

Based on those views and on feedback obtained from members over the years, among the more valuable products and services MANA members count on are:

**Promotion of the profession** — In another article in this issue of *Agency Sales*, a manufacturers' rep notes, "If you look around the country, there aren't that many other groups you can join that lend support and communicate the importance of the independent manufacturers' representative. When a manufacturer decides to outsource his sales function, MANA has always been there to guide them through the process and educate them about the benefit of reps. MANA has always treated manufacturers and reps fairly."

More than just advocating the use of manufacturers' representatives as the most efficient means for manufacturers to go to market, MANA serves as its constituents' advocate in a couple of other important areas:

**Involvement in governmental affairs** — MANA has done a good job of protecting the profession when it comes to the successful efforts undertaken with various state legislatures and lobbying for federal tax laws and regulations favorable to the professional sales company. Among the many important accom-

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plishments in this area have been the successful passage of commission protection legislation in Florida, North Carolina and Connecticut, among other states.

In addition to its efforts in federal and state legislative areas, MANA also keeps abreast of important national governmental matters via its membership in the Small Business Legislative Council (SBLC) in Washington, D.C.

**Networking with other rep associations** — In an interview with Joe Miller that appeared earlier this year in *Agency Sales*, the former MANA president/CEO noted the success of the association's ongoing unification strategy among the various rep associations. According to Miller, "This has been successful as seen in the management services the association presently provides AIM/R, PTRA and NAGMR, all successful, industry-specific associations of reps. Then there have been our efforts in leading AMRA and informally working together with those rep associations who do not require MANA's management assistance to the benefit of all reps."

One of the many examples of how rep associations can work together to the benefit of all is seen in the two successful *Keystone* conferences that have been open to reps serving all industries.

**Counseling** — Reps seeking guidance on how to wrestle with commission cuts and how to survive the rigors of termination, or principals looking for guidance on how to locate reps or establish rep councils have found a home in MANA.

Under the heading of counseling, it's noteworthy that the association divides counseling into two categories: Business and Legal.

- **Business** — MANA is different from many other associations in that its executives are either former professional field sales organization owners or hold the CPMR designation. As a result, the membership benefits because these executives have personal experience and have walked in their shoes. An important part of their duties resides in speaking with the membership, learning about the issues and then, either based on their own experiences or from what they've learned from other members, making recommendations or providing resources to assist in achieving a desired outcome.

An important side benefit of the association's counseling service resides in the fact that when staff members engage members in telephone sessions, that often provides the staff member with an opportunity to properly direct the member to the appropriate



MANA service or product. As a result, the member seeking the counseling could find answers to their questions via immediate access to the *MANA Online Directory*, a special report, a recent timely article in *Agency Sales*, or an ongoing series of rep-manufacturer seminars.

- **Legal** — A benefit that all members enjoy is a 15–20 minute consultation with an attorney known to the association as being experienced and knowledgeable concerning the rep business and laws that govern rep-principal relationships. An outgrowth of this work with rep-knowledgeable attorneys has been the annual *MANA Legal Symposium*, where many of those attorneys gather for a full-day meeting to discuss their experiences and study current developments and trends in rep law.

**Networking** — The ability of MANA members to network with each other takes many forms under the MANA umbrella. At one time the association's Local Networking Chapters met that need. In the past year, however, those meetings have been replaced

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with all-rep events that have met with considerable success. Such events (e.g., in Chicago, Phoenix and Salt Lake City) allow for collaboration on the part of all rep associations and provide a place for reps to meet with fellow professionals to network and exchange ideas, problems and the solutions to problems. More of these events are planned for the future. Then there are the plentiful networking opportunities that occur during various events including the aforementioned

Keystone conference and standalone gatherings, such as the annual CAPSIG meeting and annual conferences of AIM/R and PTR.A.

**Matchmaking** — One of the most often-cited benefits of membership in MANA is the ability for reps to locate potential principals and for principals to locate potential reps for their product lines. Historically the classified pages section of *Agency Sales* magazine (reaching more than 9,000 subscribers) has gone a long way toward meeting this need — and that's still the case to this day. An important point to remember, however, is that not all principals advertise in the pages of the magazine. That's why it's important to take advantage of the benefits of the association's *Online Directory*. Over the last several years the *MANA Online Directory* has replaced the bulky printed version of the membership directory that served the association for years. Currently the association's 3,800 agencies and approximately 1,500 association manufacturers or service providers are listed. Admittedly, while the directory is set up primarily for manufacturers to locate potential agents, it also can be used by agents to locate prospective

lines. To learn what it's all about and to experience how easy it is to locate prospective marketing partners, members simply have to go to the member area of the MANA web site, click on the link that says "Find Manufacturers' Agents Here" and click on "Agree" on the disclaimer page. Once that's done, simply follow instructions.

**Education** — The half-day seminar program on *Successfully Managing Conflicts in the Rep-Manufacturer Relationship* that began last month and runs through November serves as a prime example of one of the important segments of MANA's mission statement that states the mission shall be accomplished "...through a major focus on education."

This current seminar is just the latest in an annual series of such presentations that address matters of concern to reps and their principals.

Buttressing the messages delivered in the seminars is *Agency Sales* magazine, the association's monthly magazine, and a full inventory of special reports aimed at illuminating various aspects of the professional field sales operation.

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### There's Much More to Learn

Admittedly, we've only touched the surface regarding the benefits that membership in the association provides. For more detailed information there are at least three steps to follow:

- Thoroughly examine your personal "Explore Your Membership Benefits" binder. Many of your questions will be answered immediately.
- Regularly visit MANA's web site ([www.MANAonline.org](http://www.MANAonline.org)). In addition to a complete listing of the association's products and services, you'll also be able to keep up to date on MANA activities via the section entitled *This Week at MANA*.
- Finally, if all else fails, or if it's just important to immediately obtain personal feedback to any questions or pressing problems, call MANA toll-free at (877) 626-2776. □

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One Spectrum Pointe, Suite 150, Lake Forest, CA 92630-2283 • Phone: (949) 859-4040 • Toll-free: (877) 626-2776 • Fax: (949) 855-2973  
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