
Striving To Be The Best

This is hardly the first time *Agency Sales* magazine has noted the activities of Gerrard & Associates, Inc., Mooresville, North Carolina. Perhaps that's reason enough for the agency to be the most recent addition to our growing list of "Perfect Reps."

Whether the subject was the importance of rep councils, creating customer profiles or the need for reps to properly understand their job function, Gerrard & Associates has served as a prime example of how a rep should operate efficiently and professionally.

As a result, it's not surprising that Frank Warmoth, Dearborn Midwest Conveyor Company, maintains, "I've worked with many reps in a variety of different businesses, and Bob Gerrard and his agency are special. They are among the very best we've ever worked with — whether that means representing our products in the market or selling products to us."

Dearborn Midwest Conveyor Company, with headquarters in Taylor, Michigan, is a full-service manufacturer of material handling products.

According to Warmoth, "We work with a small sales staff, which enables us to keep costs down. At the same time, we retain the technical knowledge within the organization. The primary functions the rep performs for us are to maintain personal contact in the field and develop relationships with our customers. This provides us with the dual benefit of having our reps communicate leads for new business, and they assist us by providing the feedback from relationships they have developed."

He continues that the layered type of sales operation the manu-

facturer works with is composed of an internal sales staff supported by an estimating group. The most obvious benefit of using a rep sales force is that it "allows the company to broadcast its message nationwide. Our reps make contacts and provide all the elements that are so important from a sales and marketing standpoint. They keep our name out there and follow up with customers."

Thorough Product Knowledge

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Warmoth notes that perhaps the biggest challenge he and his company face is that of “having the rep understand our products and working with a thorough knowledge of what it is that our products do best. We also depend upon them to direct our efforts and let us know ahead of time how our time can best be spent. For instance, we depend on our reps to steer us away from dead ends and let us know if we’d be wasting our time bidding on some projects where there is little hope for an order.”

When it comes to Bob Gerrard and Gerrard & Associates, Warmoth explains, “I’ve known Bob for more than 20 years. He’s called on us as a rep for another company, so I’ve known him by performance and reputation for a long time.”

When it came time for the manufacturer to locate a rep for North Carolina and Virginia, “We immediately thought of him. Bob is very strategic in the way he approaches his business. In addition, he’s very organized and works at a high energy level. He compounds that with his personal skills and abilities. He constantly makes the extra effort to learn all he can about our products — that includes the pros and cons associated with each product offering. He digs into what makes a project

appealing to us, and he’s helped us quite a bit when it comes to developing our sales strategy.”

Organized Communication

Warmoth isn’t done yet. “Then there’s his ability to communicate with us. Bob has to have the most comprehensive and organized communication program I’ve ever encountered in terms of prioritizing his sales calls and then providing the needed feedback to us.”

According to the manufacturer, Gerrard assigns his assistant the task of planning and scheduling his sales trips. The sales calls are planned to track the path he travels and will include regular visits and cold calls. “As he finishes a call, he dictates notes back to the assistant, who then transcribes the information into a sales report that is e-mailed to us. This keeps us completely apprised of what he’s doing in the field.

“In general, I wish other reps would operate in a manner similar to Bob. I’ve even asked him if he would conduct some training for our other reps.”

It is no easy task for a rep firm to reach a point where one of its principals holds it in such high esteem. In noting the compliments that Warmoth and Dearborn Midwest Conveyor send his way, Bob Gerrard points to his more than three-decade track record of working closely with and serving principals in-



Bob Gerrard

involved in dry bulk material handling equipment and services.

According to Gerrard, “What ultimately brought me to a career as a manufacturers’ representative is the fact that I’ve always been drawn to tangible sales, and there’s no better place to achieve tangible sales than as a rep. In addition, I think an attraction to sales has always been in me. Plus, I think I’ve always been a persuasive communicator. That’s a combination that’s worked well for me.”

Adding Another Generation

Gerrard explained that he joined his father’s rep firm after spending a couple of years selling life insurance. Just as he joined his father’s firm, he reports that his

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son David will follow his lead and join Gerrard & Associates shortly after the first of the year.

In reviewing how he's been able to establish and maintain strong relationships with his principals, Gerrard stresses the importance of being able to "clearly identify and perform the functions that are associated with being a rep. That's an important task to complete because you've got to communicate to the manufacturer that you do more than just make calls and follow up. You do that by specifically defining all the functions that you perform. That's how you're able to stand apart from the competition.

"This is all a part of us becoming as good as we can be. Another part of becoming as good as we

can evolves from working closely with our principals. I'm a firm believer that if I can draw information and experience from my principals, I can bring that to bear on my own territory. That provides me an advantage over my competition — so much so that I feel a little sorry for them — but not too sorry."

When asked to draw any conclusions he might have as to why he enjoys such an enviable relationship with Dearborn Midwest Conveyor, Gerrard offers, "Much of it has to do with our ability to truly understand what the role of a rep is. I know that personally my goal is to reach a point where I'm the very best at what I do. Along those lines, I believe that I can communicate better than any

other rep in the world. One thing I can't say is that I'll have more sales in my territory than any other rep will. That's something that's out of my control. One thing I can do, however, is to provide my principals with more information about my marketplace than anyone else can. That's something I do have complete control over. I can let my principals know everything there is to know about business in the territory. I can tell them what projects are coming up, where they're coming from and what the politics are among the customers. That's all within my control. That's my mantra that I keep on repeating: 'Be the absolute best communicator on the planet!' That's what I do." □

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