
Building On Past Successes



When Bryan Shirley, CPMR, walked through the doors as MANA's new president/CEO last fall, he brought with him more than two decades of experience in the field as a successful manufacturers' representative serving the electronics industry. More important, when he arrived at association headquarters last October he had a keen appreciation for the vital role the association plays in the business lives of its members.

According to Shirley, "When considering what rep associations mean to the business lives of their members, I'd maintain that it's key to keep in mind:

- The support we provide individual reps.
- The advocacy we provide for the rep function.
- Networking opportunities (a greatly undervalued offering.)
- And finally, the complete menu of services we provide, including educational programs, conferences, seminars, certification programs and vast communication (e.g., *Agency Sales* magazine, special reports, website communication, 'webinars')."

In speaking to the aspect of other sister associations, MANA's new president emphasizes, "It's

important that we keep in mind the critical functions provided by a vertical (e.g., NEMRA, ERA, MAFSI) vs. a horizontal association such as MANA."

Shirley notes that the vertical associations "are doing a great job of serving reps in a more specific product community and provide a voice that speaks more clearly to the issues and concerns affecting a particular industry.

"In addition to providing a home to those 'specific-community' reps, MANA goes a step further when it comes to addressing the concerns of reps and manufacturers whose interests are broader in scope."

He explains, "MANA meets the needs of its constituents by providing education and a steady flow of communication aimed at

anticipating and solving their problems. We also provide a wealth of networking opportunities with other reps and manufacturers. Another important function is performed by the association as we continue to enhance our matchmaking between manufacturers and reps of similar interests (manufacturers finding reps, and reps finding manufacturers)."

As he continues to view the roles of the vertical and horizontal associations, Shirley emphasizes the importance of the various rep associations working closely together — something that MANA has done for many years. "From my perspective," he says, "we will continue the communication and networking efforts we've already made with our sister associations through vehicles such as MRERF and AMRA, and various joint educational/networking conferences, such as *Keystone*." He adds, "As always, MANA will reach out to the other rep associations within MRERF in order to determine what benefits/services we can provide together to benefit all reps."

The Value of MRERF

Having mentioned MRERF, Shirley continues that "MRERF and the CPMR certification program remain important assets for today's independent rep. When a manufacturer's representative takes precious time away from his business in order to invest in his education as a complete businessman, it signals a personal desire to not only improve the efficiencies of his business, but also to increase his level of professional commitment.

More and more, manufacturers are recognizing the value of that commitment and the importance of the CPMR certification."

Assuming the role as head of MANA does not come without challenges, and Shirley is quick to acknowledge several challenges that he sees looming large on the horizon. "Perhaps the most surprising ongoing challenge I see is that of communication to our members. It was immediately obvious to me that MANA has tremendous tools and assets it puts to the task of communicating with reps and associates. While those assets include *Agency Sales*, other publications and our recently revamped web site, I'd have to say our greatest communication tool is our customer-oriented staff.

"In the first few days on the job, I was able to witness firsthand

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Bryan Shirley, CPMR, is no stranger to MANA members and associates. He is a former member of MANA, and most recently served as the President/CEO of Colrud Corporation, a New Jersey-based manufacturers' representative agency. In the public speaking arena, he had extensive involvement in ERA conferences, and has presented to more than a dozen of MANA's sister associations, including NEMRA, HIRA, MAFSI, PTRA and WAMA. He also consulted with rep firms in various industries on buy-sell agreements, succession planning, compensation plans and strategic planning. As a visiting professor at Arizona State University (ASU), he teaches Motivational Compensation for Outside Sales 201 for the CPMR certification program of MRERF.

A graduate of Virginia Tech, Shirley is a long-time resident of the southern New Jersey/Philadelphia area. He has now relocated to Newport Beach, California.

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the extensive personal customer service that MANA staff provides to not only its members, but non-members as well. All of our well-experienced staff members remain ready to address members' concerns and communicate what products/services the association has available to help solve issues and problems. There is an amazing amount of information within the walls of MANA, and I'm now referring to all of this wealth as 'our best kept secrets.' It is my

plan that we will take our communication capabilities to the next level with input and effort from our team, the board of directors, executive committee and our members. We will streamline our information flow to ensure it provides the membership with concise, potent and extremely valuable information to assist them in their businesses."

Next up in the challenge department for Shirley is improving the perceived value among the membership of the association's education programming. "We're going to carefully consider new ways to deliver our conference and seminar offerings in order to minimize the expenditure of our members' most valuable currency — their time. Our goal is to continue to impact the rep's business life without taking him away from his precious time in the field in front of the customer."

Working in the Digital Age

While communication and education head the list of concerns for the new MANA president, he notes, "While we'll reach our goals in those areas, at the same time we will continue to advance MANA's efforts in the

digital age. Members will experience continued enhancements in our electronic and web-based initiatives — all geared to provide them with solutions for their business concerns, including new efforts with our technology committee, which will investigate, report and advise members about the latest products and services to update their rep firms' communication and operations."

As he looks to what the future holds for his tenure with MANA, Shirley adds some thoughts for both members and prospective members. "In addition to providing products/services to its members, rep associations are all about marketing, and that's something I've loved doing for my entire career. I've been tasked to build on the progress that preceded me and to take MANA to the next level. That is exactly what the MANA team is going to do.

"For our current members, I make the promise that we will continue the high level of support and service for the independent rep and for the rep function.

"My message to prospective members is an open invitation to look at us, learn what we have to offer and then judge for themselves if we meet their needs." □

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