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[ REP TECHNOLOGY ]

# POWERTOOLS

FOR PROFIT & PRODUCTIVITY

EDITORIAL | TERRY BROCK



## TERRY BROCK

**Terry L. Brock** is a marketing coach who helps business owners market more effectively leveraging technology. He shows busy professionals how to squeeze more out of their busy days using the right rules and tools. He can be reached at **407-363-0505**, by email: [terry@terrybrock.com](mailto:terry@terrybrock.com) or through his website: [terrybrock.com](http://terrybrock.com).

As an independent manufacturers' rep, you need a competitive advantage. Okay, okay — you've been in the field for 1,000 years, you know your stuff, your persuasive powers can coax a hungry dog off a meat truck, and you're good-lookin' on top of that! However, **to get that extra boost, you need technology**. Not just a bunch of gadgets and contraptions but the tools that will help you leverage your ability to increase productivity and profitability.

In an economy that is going through struggles, you want to be able to turn on a dime, change course and operate from anywhere there is business potential. This article is designed to give you a competitive advantage by both introducing you to the available tools and by providing you with the necessary specifics. So, roll up your sleeves, get your pen out and get ready to move to the next level of profits and productivity as a rep.

### Starting Out

Here are some tools that I have found to be enormously beneficial:

**Smartphone for voice communication** — You want a mobile phone that has good features for connecting with people. A removable SIM card provides you with the ability to use various carriers, depending upon what is best for your region and needs. In my international travels, I usually have a SIM card for each country, which provides a local number for contacts to reach me when I'm there. I'm also using Apple's iPhone and have found the ability to access the internet very beneficial. The new 2.0 software is fabulous. Contacts can be accessed much easier than before. GPS built into the new 3G phone can save your neck. Also, as a road warrior, consider having two cell phones. Things break, and if your cell phone doesn't work in a particular area or is lost or stolen, have a plan in place so you can at least make essential calls to prospects and important contacts. A \$10 phone from Wal-Mart can be a lifesaver in a tight situation — and can increase your bottom line.

**Web-based email access** — This is vital today. The Blackberry devices have become addictive (often called "Crackberries") because they provide good email access. However, be considerate of others. Don't check email when you're in an important meeting, at a business luncheon or when it would be what society used to call in more cordial times — *rude!* Have access always, but use your head about *when* to access!

**Sheet-fed scanner** — In the October issue of **Agency Sales**, I told you about the NetReceipts sheet-fed scanner that I use. I take it on the road, as it only weighs a few ounces and connects to my USB port. With that I can quickly scan business cards, important receipts, handwritten notes, to-do lists, magazine articles and more. Scans are converted to a PDF and can then be emailed to an assistant, to clients or to a computer for online storage. Organization is imperative for success. Using a tool like this can get you organized, save a lot of grief when trying to locate important information, and help connect with people. Relationship marketing shines with the right tools.

**Audio and video** — We live in a media world. People love video and audio which makes it important to gain the ability to leverage these technologies. I show clients how they can use the two in their business and explore the specifics of what works best for them. For audio, you can capture quick thoughts and use them later. Video opens a world of possibilities to capture important pictures, scenes of important events, quick messages to others and more. See my blog for examples of how you could use this medium to connect with others.

**A resourceful, flexible mindset** — This is the most important. Have the ability to adapt as things go wrong (they will), situations change (count on it), and people don't do what they said they would (welcome to reality). The flexible and adaptable person survives while others whine and complain.

**BONUS:** Get your voicemail messages transcribed and read them. You can read faster than you can listen. For \$40/month you can get your voicemail messages transcribed and sent immediately to your email. Collect both email messages and phone messages in one place quickly, easily — and quietly! Check out **PhoneTag.com**. I use it regularly and it is a real productivity booster!

For further information, see the videos I've put together for you on my blog/website at **TerryBrock.com**. Got questions? Leave a message in the "Reply" box and I'll be able

## The flexible and adaptable person survives while others whine and complain.

to get back to you with direct and specific answers to your case.

### Strength in Relationships

With all the tools you acquire, remember to be results-focused, not technology-enamored. After all, that is the real strength of a good rep. Use technology to strengthen and build relationships. Think about it. The technology we use today might seem really nifty and groovy for now. However, what about the technology you were using just five years ago? Today it seems antiquated and even laughable. What do you think the latest gizmo or gadget you get from today's slick magazine or hot website will look like in five years? Compare that with the satisfaction of a quality, value-for-value business relationship. As we all know, but must be reminded of from time to time: Technology is nice, but relationships are what matter most.


Think of technologies that can enhance your personal relationships. Phones are one of the most important. They provide a good connection with others. Just be safe and courteous when using them. And please — no more calls interrupting business meetings, okay? If it rings, let it go to voice mail — turn off your sound and catch it later. Most of us are not doctors on call or waiting for the “baby is coming” call from a spouse. Concentrate on the person you are with *now*. This is basic courtesy. Voice mail is a beautiful thing!

### Technology to the Rescue

Here's a trick I share with my coaching clients: You can slice through mountains of email fast and be even more personal with a couple of key technologies. And yes, you can have both — warm, personal communication and the ability to process email faster.

Think audio and video. Often I'll send a quick audio message or video message to someone. They know it is me doing it and it not a mass email. They see my facial expressions (on video, of course) and hear the inflection in my voice. This eliminates any misconceptions that can arise from mere text on a screen.

Of course, this should only be used in high value-for-value situations. You can't do this for just anyone who sends you an email or you'd go nuts. However, when the communication represents high value in business (read serious business possibilities) video is worth it. Invest a few moments of time to learn how to create video (it's easy). It will pay off in hours of time savings, increased personal contacts and increased business profits.

Leverage technology and focus on building quality, value-for-value, profitable relationships in business. This is what relationship marketing is all about and you can use it to build your business as a rep. 





## THE MAGIC OF VIDEO | Seeing is Believing

BY JACK FOSTER



Use of video by and for independent manufacturers' representatives fulfills a number of compelling needs. As can be read in this and past issues of **Agency Sales Magazine**, video is immediate, easy, portable, timely, and it crosses cultural and generational boundaries.

This is a message that has been reiterated any number of times in this and other publications. This time it comes from **Bill Floyd** who, when he toiled in the trenches as a rep, was a member of MANA. Today he's one of the executives of **ElectricSmarts (electricsmarts.com)**. In this capacity he's a heavy user of video as a means of communicating with his reps, manufacturers and distributor customers. As far as he's concerned, "Video couldn't be any more efficient, effective or easier to use."

According to Floyd, "As soon as the electronic pipeline grew large enough to accommodate video, it became a 'no-brainer' as to whether this was an effective means of communication or not. Now that the message can be effectively and inexpensively delivered directly to someone's desktop or laptop, there's nothing better."

To make his point, he cites the fact that, as a result of changes in communication,

people don't read as much as they once did. "People want to see, feel and experience things. That's why being able to visually demonstrate a product or an application is so effective. Add to that the fact that we're becoming a much more diverse and multi-lingual country than ever before. What better means to communicate a new product or show how it's used than via hands-on demonstration? Consider the differences in how various generations prefer their communications. Younger people remain glued to their SmartPhones, iPods and computers. If you want to reach that demographic, video is the way to go."

Then there's the fact that you can "re-purpose" video. Floyd compares the traditional catalog or print ad to today's video presentations: "An ad or catalog is picked up, looked at and put away. On the other hand, a well-put-together video can be used to introduce a product for training purposes and see yet another life at a trade show."

**"By making use of this leading-edge technology, the rep is branding himself as the source for information and product knowledge."**




Specifically, Floyd sees a number of compelling ways that reps can put video to work. He suggests training and education, more than anything else. “Some reps that we work with will play the product videos we have. They’ll stop at the end of each chapter and discuss what they’ve seen prior to moving on to the next step. And there’s not only education for the reps. Consider what the rep can do with video to train and educate customers. By utilizing video, the training that reps provides (with the assistance of their principals) is not only consistent but it’s constant. The training goes on in the absence of the rep. The customer can avail himself of various training modules whether the rep is there or not.”

In addition to the training and education aspects of video, Floyd

points to the use of video as a means for the rep to differentiate himself in the marketplace. “By making use of this leading-edge technology,” he says, “the rep is branding himself as the source for information and product knowledge. Before he knows it, customers will be thinking of him as the go-to guy whenever they have a question or need the solution to a problem.”

If there’s even a modicum of agreement concerning what Floyd has already said, then the question remains: What’s the rep supposed to do about it? Where’s the rep supposed to go in order to jump on this fast-moving train? “Put the pressure on the manufacturer,” Floyd says. “I maintain that leaning on your principal for assistance in this area is the way to go. He’s the one who’s sup-

posed to know the industry and the needs of customers. At the same time, he should be aware of the technological tools (e.g., streaming video), so why reinvent the wheel? Ask him for his support.”

Whether the rep has concerns over the cost, the lack of technological expertise, or the possession of limited creative ability, Floyd urges reps to embrace the use of video. “This is just another of the many marketing tools you have at your disposal. Where it was once direct mail, fax machines or email, video is another trigger to pull in order to remain in front of your customers. You can’t afford to walk away from it. Anything that’s this new and exciting is worth your attention. Embrace the opportunity.” 



## JACK FOSTER

**Jack Foster**, president of Foster Communications, is the editor of **Agency Sales Magazine**. In addition to his duties in working with MANA, Jack writes for several other major marketing publications. His experience in publishing includes writing, editing, photography, production and printing. This, combined with Jack’s understanding of the independent sales rep function, can provide the winning formula for your communication needs. Email: [jfoster@manaonline.org](mailto:jfoster@manaonline.org).