

a MANA resource for principals and reps

agency sales[®]

OCTOBER 2017
\$12.97



MANA Celebrates 70 Years of Support

**Tommy Garnett (above), President &
CEO of Garnett Component Sales,
Celebrates His Agency's 25th Anniversary**

**MANA Revisits Jon Crowley of
Charles P. Crowley Company,
Celebrating 85 Years in Business**





Lessons Learned From Sports Paved the Way for Rep

BY JACK FOSTER

Just as so many of his MANA-member peers, Tommy Garnett's path to becoming a rep began with a family connection, but unlike many others he took a bit of a detour first.

In the past, *Agency Sales* magazine has described how professional basketball and baseball players have morphed into independent manufacturers' representatives. However, Garnett, president & CEO of Garnett Component Sales, Inc. (GCS), Wake Forest, North Carolina, is the first professional golfer.

Departing the business of golf, where he was a member of the PGA of America, was hardly Garnett's motivating factor for becoming a rep. "When I decided to leave golf it was because I didn't really see it as a long-term career path for me or my family. What motivated me was that I knew the rep business as a result of growing up in the profession with my father. In addition, I knew I had an entrepreneurial spirit

and wanted to own and grow my own business."

Garnett, who played Division 1 baseball in college, didn't leave golf without some valuable life tools, however. "I grew up playing team sports and I'm a huge advocate for what they teach you. Sports have played a major role in everything I know about life and have laid the foundation for what I am today. Specifically from golf I learned the value of a work ethic, discipline, determination, patience and the drive for success."

Growing Up in the Business

Garnett explains that he was first exposed to the rep world by his father, who introduced him to the business. "I just about grew up in the



© Christine_ | stock.adobe.com

Tommy Garnett, president & CEO of Garnett Component Sales, who began as a one-person, one-line agency, celebrates his agency's 25th anniversary this year.

business. I began as a one-person, one-line agency more than 25 years ago. It's obviously worked out, since we're celebrating our 25th anniversary this year."

Armed with a part-time bookkeeper and administrator many years ago, he explains, "As the lines we represented grew, so too did the need for additional sales representatives throughout our territory. We brought on additional staff and sales support allowing us to provide a broader range of geographic coverage for our principals. Today we have a sales team, administrative staff and a full team of consultants that provide legal, accounting and human resource services."

According to Garnett, "Presently GCS focuses on engineered mechanical component requirements for the OEM community because we feel that it is the best market niche for our principals and the best match for their capabilities. This allows us to provide a synergistic line card to tier automotive, industrial, aerospace, medical, and a variety of other types of industries."

When it comes to partnering with manufacturers serving those industries, he explains, "We receive frequent requests for representation from companies that have located us via the MANA online directory, our website (www.gcsrep.com) and from referrals from our customers or principals."

With more than a quarter century under his belt as an independent rep, Garnett has seen plenty of changes in the way his profession has evolved. One of the more striking changes, he maintains, is the emergence of the global marketplace. "When we first opened our doors there wasn't nearly the amount of overseas sourcing as there is today. With the advent of the Internet there are now any number of opportunities to work with suppliers located around the world."

Technology's Impact

If operating on a global stage is one major change Garnett has dealt with in his 25 years as a rep, so too is the impact of technology. "Looking back to 1992 when we opened our doors, there was no Internet, no cell phones. That required you to knock on doors and build relationships with customers. There was perhaps a greater level of loyalty among customers and not as much shuffling

among suppliers as you experience today. On the other hand, the technological tools we have today have allowed us to communicate more efficiently with principals and customers and provide more value-add. In the end, technology has opened a lot of doors for us."

Staying on the subject of technology, Garnett notes that his agency has made efficient use of social media to communicate with prospects,

"Specifically from golf I learned the value of a work ethic, discipline, determination, patience and the drive for success."



While golf is still a major part of his life, Garnett admits he didn't see it as a long-term career path for him or his family.

“In the end,
technology has
opened a lot of
doors for us.”

principals and customers. “We maintain a presence on LinkedIn and Twitter. We feel that LinkedIn is the social media network best suited to our business. In addition, we’ve found that Twitter allows us to effectively provide brief updates to our followers and to share links for additional information.”

When asked if there are any specific areas of concern for his agency, Garnett points to a couple of subjects:

- Long-term contractual protection — “Typically reps are on the hook with principals for periods ranging from 30 to 60, or 90 days. We’re constantly making the effort to do a better job when it comes to writing contracts with our principals. We want to avoid the scenario where we’ve worked in a territory for a year, done a good job and a manufacturer decides they want to go direct. Keep in mind that most contracts are drafted for the benefit of the manufacturer. We work with our attorneys to ensure we achieve mutually agreeable benefits.”

Garnett explains that when it’s not possible to reach agreement on those terms, “You have to be willing to walk away from certain business opportunities.”

- Maintaining a competitive presence — “This is something we work very closely with our principals. It’s our job to convey to them what we see in the territory. We encourage them to stay on the cutting edge of technology and impress upon them the need to constantly come up with

new products, new facilities and innovative marketing programs.”

- Identifying principal partners that support the rep business model — “We’re fortunate that the principals we work with understand and support the rep business model. They understand our value-add. When it comes to locating new principals, it’s important to find companies that have a successful history and a commitment to working with reps. You want to make sure that whomever you work with believes in the rep’s ability to open doors for them.”

He notes that all of this becomes apparent during the interview process with a prospective principal. “Just as they show their commitment to the rep way of doing business, we’re able to put on the table everything we can do for them. In my opinion that’s what differentiates us from so many other agencies.”

Why MANA?

Garnett, who has been a member of MANA for 11 years, explains that “We’re proud of our MANA membership and make sure to advertise our affiliation on our website and in all of our correspondence.

As a MANA member we benefit from the general business knowledge that the association provides (e.g., best business practices, sample representation agreements, professional development resources, etc.). In addition, we’ve found that *Agency Sales* magazine always provides a great deal of interesting and useful information on our profession. We regularly advertise our agency in the marketing section of MANA and finally it was through our membership in the association that we became aware of MRERF’s CPMR program.”

That last point is one that Garnett emphasizes. “In addition to our membership in MANA, among the best decisions we’ve ever made as an organization has been to invest in our people. By having an operational system in place, and educating and training our personnel, we’ve been able to achieve a true team effort. By working as a unified team we’ve been able to stay focused and achieve our corporate goals.”

MANA welcomes your comments on this article. Write to us at mana@manaonline.org.



www.gcsrep.com