

Inside Sales and the
Manufacturers' Representative:

Key Factors in Creating Mutual Success

BY TOMMY GARNETT

The relationship between a manufacturer's inside sales staff and the representing agency is one of the most crucial elements in creating mutual success.

Inside sales serves a dual role; first, they must provide support and service to the customer and secondly, they have to champion the rep and their efforts.

Several key factors play a role in this model: communication, recognition, support, and the rep model being accepted as an extension of the manufacturer.



Communication must flow both ways and consist of timely written and verbal dialogue. It is incumbent upon the representative to keep the inside sales staff fully aware of open opportunities, quote feedback, changes in plant personnel, and issues that may affect the production or ordering of requirements. A weekly call or taking a few minutes to draft a summary e-mail upon conclusion of sales visit serves to keep the

inside staff abreast of current topics covered. By communicating on a regular weekly basis, the representative can then address any topics or related issues being conveyed back from the plant.

Recognition by the representative to the inside sales staff and to plant management for those who continually excel in servicing the customer and the representative alike. Each year, we like to sit down as an agency

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with all field sales representatives and discuss all of our lines and specifically inside sales support. We are trying to identify those who we feel have contributed to our growth and success while placing the highest level of customer service and satisfaction with the customer. Typically, we identify outstanding individual performers and recognize them with a plaque or piece of crystal. The award simply states these individuals are being recognized by our agency for outstanding performance during the year. I can tell you that inside sales personnel appreciate this recognition as they typically go unnoticed, but it is the team effort which makes for the successes.

Support is vital to the relationship. The representative needs a champion at the plant level who can turn quotes in a timely manner, work with various internal departments so that opportunities obtain the proper level of attention. The inside sales personnel know the inner workings of the manufacturing plant and can navigate them better and in many cases more efficiently than the representative.

Finally, the inside sales staff needs to perceive the rep model as a true extension of the manufacturer. Even though reps are independent, the relationship must operate with full transparency. Inside sales should not see the rep as an added layer but rather a valuable asset who can gain face-to-face access with the customer and build on relationships.

When all of these pieces come together, this relationship works in sync and unison to create a very valuable sales approach for the manufacturer and representative alike. When it breaks down, just the opposite can take place. Take the time to communicate, recognize, support, and fully engage in the rep model for maximum mutual benefit. This creates a "win-win" environment.



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