

The Thinking Salesman Letter

Sept. 15, 2011

Hello Everybody,

Al Brosseau, forty years identifying, setting up and administering distribution networks across the USA, Canada and Latin America as salesman, sales mgr., independent rep and now consultant.

Our Mission:

To openly discuss and challenge all aspects of sales and distribution and to promote the sales profession.

Al Brosseau,
Former President, ALBRO Export & Marketing, Inc.
Former CSI (Vermont chapter) & CDT
CPMR (Indiana U., 2003)
MANA board of directors (2002 to 2007)
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On the Firing Line

*(None of this stuff is made up,
and the names may have been omitted to protect the guilty)*

We met with a fellow Rep -we will call him John- who told us an interesting but all too common story.

John is located west of Toronto and this Principal is from the Toronto area proper. The Principal uses factory sales people in his HQ territory and Mfrs' Reps in outlying areas. This Principal comes up with a sales lead in a remote community 325 miles east of Toronto and asks John to call on this "potential".

John makes some enquiries about this "lead". It a \$300.00 potential order. He naturally put this "opportunity" on his "next time I'm in that area" list. This did not suit the Principal who insisted John call on the "potential" immediately. It bothered John and he asked one of the factory salesman why the factory sales people were not handling that lead. The answer "We are not authorized to travel outside the factory territory".

John resigned the line and he found a replacement in no time.

Al's Factory Proximity Corollary: If a Mfr. uses factory sales people in his own HQ territory and in outlying ones Reps, the chances of a Rep being replaced by factory sales people are exponentially proportional to his proximity to the Mfr's HQ.

Promoting Upstream

A few weeks back we sent out an in-house survey of how satisfied Mfrs are with their Rep network. It was a small survey and as expected over 70% of the manufacturers didn't answer, therefore the survey is hardly scientific but one point kept creeping back consistently –even among those very satisfied with their Reps- it was **the lack (or perceived) lack of communications from their Reps.**

This is the single biggest complaint we've been hearing about Reps for years. We're not talking about daily business communications, **we're talking about keeping the Principals informed of where the agency is going, its plans, its vision and what it's doing to get there.** Very few of us keep our Principals abreast of our plans (thst'd when we have a plan...) **When it comes to communications Mfrs have a legitimate beef.**

Promoting Upstream to current Principals.

You should first develop a mission statement for your organization but it takes time and we'll cover mission statements later.

Make a list of your agency's strong points:

- Look at everything. What to you might consider routine or a fact of everyday life at your agency might impress a manufacturer. For instance, which contact management or customer relation program do you use? How do you follow up on quotations? What's your approach for closing orders? Do you have a good closing rate?
- How compatible (self supporting, synergistic) are your lines? How does your "package", your offering to your customers profit your Principals?
- How effective are you in your territory? Do you have people appointed to geographic areas and/or particular lines?
- Do you offer services other agencies do not?
- How do you keep sharp? Do you and your staff take professional development courses?
- Ask yourself, "What do we do better, what distinguishes us from the competition? Why should a Principal use us instead of somebody else, including a factory sales force?"

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List those points keeping the “elevator test” below and its axiom in mind:

The elevator test:

You finally secured an appointment to make a presentation to a VIP (Very Important Prospect). You make sure you're on time, you park your car in the underground garage and you head for the elevator. As you step in the elevator your VIP is there and you both recognize each other. Your VIP tells you “*Sorry, but something came up, I must cancel our appointment but I'll listen to you 'til we reach my 32nd floor*”.

Axiom to the elevator test:

The longer your answer the less likely you know how to compete.

Discipline of Market Leaders, by M. Treacy & F Wiersema

Put them in a letter form and send it to your Principal's staff, all the people you interact with. Follow up with regular updates on your progress say every six months.

Note: If not much differentiates you from the “other guy” something is amiss. Put together a training program for yourself and your staff. It does not have to be anything expensive; training sessions with your Principals is a good start. Associations also offer webinars and day and half conferences that are great refreshers. **Finally every Rep should take the CPMR course offered by MRERF.**

When we were Rep'ing, every year in December we sent our Principals two questionnaires.

- The first was seeking their evaluation of our services.
- The second was our evaluation of their product and service.

Very few answered but the few who did provided us with valuable input in adjusting our approach and even developing new programs.

P.S.: If you are interested in these questionnaires, email us at al@TheThinkingSalesman.com

Whisky Tango Foxtrot Moment

Once in a while a not so new however refreshing idea pops up. Consider the Communication Marketing Association (www.cma-cmc.org) unique business model:

- The membership is comprised of manufacturers, distributors and Reps. Everybody along the distribution chain can be a member.
- \$105.00 one might call annual dues, provided you attend the conference. If you don't attend you're charged full conference rate anyway.
- \$100.00 additional to manufacturers to offset training room, and tools.
- Plus in the last few years they have brought in a speaker at no extra charge.
- Finally, everyone pays for his room and travel.

Talk about “keeping your eye on the ball”. Everybody along the chain of supply can join, all are equal and contribute equally, all are encouraged to understand the other's role in the supply chain and become more effective but the part that impresses me the most is those who don't attend the yearly conference are charged full conference rate.

For 35 years, the CMA has been doing what associations should be all about; promoting better understanding, training and networking opportunities to everyone along the distribution chain.

Thought:

Most people stumble over the truth now and then, but they usually manage to pick themselves up and go on, anyway.

Winston Churchill

Next issue, Oct. 1, 2011,

Promoting Upstream to other Mfrs.

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