



Member's Corner

Getting ahead

by Steve Grossman, CPMR

Former IHRA President & Chairman

I know most of you have heard the phrase "A turtle only gets ahead when it sticks its neck out." There is also one theory in psychology that one only makes changes in one's life when the discomfort raises to such a level that one is no longer in a comfort zone. It is at this point that one will take risks or change behavior to find a new comfort level.

The book "Who Moved my Cheese" is based on these thoughts. (If you haven't read this short and focused best seller spend an hour and read this book.)

With all the consolidations going on, and in my opinion more on the retail side, I am doing more and more business with one or two accounts. This troubles me since it puts an awful lot of eggs in a few baskets. On one hand I like the concentration, but it concerns me that I am not casting a wide enough net.

To start covering other accounts in my so-called territory means I have to meet new buyers, which can take two years to establish a professional relationship. It also means I will probably find new lines that are out of my field of expertise. All of these take me out of my level of comfort and put me in discomfort along with being much more time consuming.

We are in a business that to stay static is to loose ground, we need to stay one step ahead of factory sales people and our factories if we are to continue to add value to the process of selling. I have always liked the saying "if you're not the lead dog the view never changes."

I am 99% sure I am going to the Canton Housewares Fair in Hong Kong next month to search out new suppliers. With so little product being made in the States,

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Newsletters — still a very important company marketing tool

by Laurence Kaufman, Public Relations Consultant

It seems that it was only yesterday when the world as we knew it was going to be overturned by the Internet, and that the two most-endangered species were reps and print media (e.g., magazines and newspapers). Now we hear that Slate, Microsoft's online 'zine, is getting ready to launch a print edition!

So maybe the rep function isn't going away either, and we should take a fresh look at a promotional method that made sense in a print world and is worth looking at in a clicks- and-bricks context: newsletters (print and eMail).

Choosing between a print or an electronic newsletter is not a straight either/or question. Your print newsletter can be posted on your Web site as a PDF file, and your eMail newsletter can be printed and used as a handout.

The eMail newsletter relieves you of much of the expense associated with print, both for production and printing, and for postage and mailing. In particular, with email, you are not locked into multiples of two for filling pages. That may relieve some of the stress of developing enough copy. Of course, not having that stress may cause you to neglect communicating worthwhile information.

Many print newsletters probably wind up in the wastebasket, unread, and many eMail newsletters more often feel the delete button before the warmth of a pair of eyes scanning it. You put the newsletter out, regardless of medium, for the people who read it, not for those who don't. If the content is worthwhile, fun to receive and to read, recipients will welcome it.

You can send an eMail newsletter as text, with links to stuff on the Web, or you can develop an HTML masthead and format, which can make your offering look more professional to those with systems that accept HTML email. (Note: Versions of America Online 5.0 and below can't accept HTML eMail, nor live links.)

One value of rep firm newsletters is that they work for a variety of audiences, including principals, customers (current and prospective) and employees (as well as their families). If you're producing it anyway, the incremental cost of adding names is negligible with print, and, of course, nil with eMail distribution. Because newsletters tend to be "soft

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Grossman (from page 1)

accounts wanting better prices/value, and overseas factories willing to offer terms on POE deliveries, it makes sense for me to invest in my future and travel overseas.

I am excited about this trip along with feeling I am a duck out of water, but I have to begin somewhere. I have spent a lot of time networking with fellow reps and manufacturers to familiarize myself as much as possible.

As I have said before, we are in a career that demands us to be always looking at new accounts, manufacturers, education, ways to think outside the box, and ways to go to market if we are going to survive and grow. To do this we need to find the strength and conviction to often be in a state of discomfort. I find that networking with fellow reps, manufacturers, and other industry leaders helps me to minimize this discomfort since they give me road maps to my new destinations.

I know I bring it up often — do yourself a favor and check into the many wonderful courses and programs offered by MRERF and other associated associations. Education by persons who know and understand what it is to be a rep will help you overcome hurdles of our everyday profession.

As ever, feel free to contact me at gmpartner@aol.com.

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sell," you can communicate frequently without being perceived as intrusive or as a pest.

Possible content for a newsletter:

- New lines you have taken on.
- New products from your principals.
- New services you are offering, whether to customers or principals.
- New personnel at your company.
- News about your own people (e.g., who got engaged, who just had a baby). It's an easy way to establish a personal footing for your business relationships.
- News about people in the territory or at the factories. Your principals will be glad to learn about people and events at your mutual customers, and your customers will be interested in what's going on with their vendors.

Newsletters can: humanize your company and put a face to the voice on the phone; let you and your staff demonstrate expertise and show insight; provide an outlet for you to write about your view of business conditions or your opinion on a new industry trend; and help make your customers more aware of the breadth and scope of your line card (you're likely to get inquiries about items you hadn't realized they might be interested in). Newsletters not only get in where you may not be able to, but also when. They stimulate people to be proactive, instead of just waiting for you to call.

Newsletters can and should be interactive. Run contests, quizzes (something that allows you to award a prize and announce winners). Like any other piece of direct mail, each issue needs to call for some action from the reader.

I ran a survey a few years ago in which I asked manufacturers: What's the biggest problem in rep communications? My favorite answer: "Lack of!"

One objective of a newsletter is to establish continuity in communication. Someone has to be responsible for getting the newsletter out on a timely basis. Adobe PageMaker and similar programs make it easy to do in-house, but will it be? You may want to think about outsourcing. Commit yourself to a schedule, and fulfill your commitment. If you are using print, don't even bother to start a newsletter if you're not going to go out at least quarterly. If you're using email, a bulletin format (short and sweet) can be issued every other week.

A newsletter instantly positions you as a communicator, a valuable component of any rep's brand identity. Try it, you'll like it.

“Seats of learning” available through MRERF

There are still plenty of seats available in the first-year (101) CPMR course — August 10-14, 2003 — at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Now is the perfect time for you and/or your company's other field sales professionals to sharpen your business skills and join the ranks of almost 2000 "premium entity" representatives in many different industries that have achieved their designation.

If you want first-hand knowledge of what the CPMR course and designation is all about, contact Steve Grossman, CPMR. The IHRA past President and Chairman of the Board says: "You can tell our members that I found the course of study worth while. Even though we are in tough times, now is probably the best time to invest in your future."

Dates for future CPMR courses are: January 11-15, 2004 at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona and August 8-12, 2004 at Indiana University.

Other MRERF educational programs include "Skills for Sales Success: Mastering Today's Key Sales Competencies" — May 6-8 and September 23-25, 2003, in Chicago.

For enrollment information and application, contact IHRA Headquarters or the MRERF website at: <http://www.mrerf.org/courses/index.html>

Laurence Kaufman is president of Kaufman Ryan Stral Inc., a marketing communications firm with expertise in industrial distribution, electronics and not-for-profit associations, and of Big World Communications, which designs and maintains Web sites for trade show, rep firm, associations and corporate clients. He also participates in Expert Access, IHRA's telephone consultation program.

You can reach Larry at 312-467-9494, or fax him at 312-467-0298, or e-mail him at lkaufman@bworld.com

2003 INDUSTRY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February

New York International Gift Fair

February 01, 2003 - February 06, 2003
New York, NY

New York Spring Gift Fair

February 02, 2003 - February 06, 2003
New York, NY

San Francisco Gift Fair

February 15, 2003 - February 19, 2003
San Francisco, CA

Coffee Fest Las Vegas

February 28, 2003 - March 02, 2003
Las Vegas, NV

March

National Coffee Association Conference

March 06, 2003 - March 08, 2003
Boca Raton, FL

Natural Products Expo West

March 06, 2003 - March 09, 2003
Anaheim, CA

Dallas International Gift & Home Accessories Market

March 15, 2003 - March 17, 2003
Dallas, TX

Atlanta Spring Gift, Accessories & Holiday Market

March 15, 2003 - March 18, 2003
Atlanta, GA

Globalshop

March 16, 2003 - March 18, 2003
Chicago, IL

IFE

March 23, 2003 - March 26, 2003
ExCeL - London, U.K.

New York Home Textiles Show

March 28, 2003 - March 31, 2003
New York, NY

April

SIAL Montreal

April 02, 2003 - April 04, 2003
Montreal, QUE, Canada

Spring Gift & Home Furnishings Market

April 06, 2003 - April 08, 2003
Los Angeles, CA

SCAA Show

April 26, 2003 - April 28, 2003
Boston, MA

New York Spring Tabletop Market

April 26, 2003 - May 01, 2003
New York, NY

May

Gourmet Products Show

May 03, 2003 - May 06, 2003
San Francisco, CA

NASFT Spring Fancy Food & FMI Show

May 04, 2003 - May 06, 2003
Chicago, IL

All Candy Expo

May 13, 2003 - May 15, 2003
Chicago, IL

NRA Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show

May 17, 2003 - May 20, 2003
Chicago, IL

SOURCES

May 17, 2003 - May 19, 2003
New York, NY

June

IDDBA Show

June 01, 2003 - June 03, 2003
Las Vegas, NV

Coffee Fest Atlantic City

June 06, 2003 - June 08, 2003
Atlantic City, NJ

Gourmet Awards

June 06, 2003 - June 08, 2003
Dallas, TX

Dallas International Gift & Home Accessories Market

June 20, 2003 - June 24, 2003
Dallas, TX

NASFT Summer International Fancy Food Show

June 29, 2003 - July 01, 2003
New York, NY

July

Atlanta International Gift & Home Furnishings Market

July 11, 2003 - July 15, 2003
Atlanta, GA

Fall Gift & Home Furnishings Market

July 15, 2003 - July 22, 2003
Los Angeles, CA

California Gift Show

July 19, 2003 - July 22, 2003
Los Angeles, CA

Washington Gift Show

July 27, 2003 - July 30, 2003
Chantilly, VA

August

Orlando Gift Show

August 02, 2003 - August 05, 2003
Orlando, FL

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Two (2) Room Suite \$193

Rooms include free deluxe continental breakfast buffet, free local phone calls, free cable TV and 24-hour hospitality room.

For reservations, fill out the following and fax it to:

(312) 832-0333

Please - DO NOT PHONE IN YOUR RESERVATION

Reservation Form (Group Code WEN) Weiner Association Mangement

Your Name _____

Company _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Business Phone _____ Fax _____

Room Type _____ Rate _____ Single ___ Double ___

Credit Card & # _____ Exp Date _____

Arrival _____ Departure _____

Comments or Special Needs _____

Note: Please copy this form and submit for separate reservations.

Make your reservations, today. These rooms will go fast!

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