
Manufacturer Provides Agents the Support They Need

By Jack Foster
December 2015



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Manufacturers demand a level of expertise when they choose to partner with independent manufacturers' representatives. Likewise, a comparable level of expertise should be present in principals when agencies make their partnering choices.

Here's how such a marketing and sales philosophy can and has been implemented in the field, according to Mills Rendell, CEO and founder of Zeus Battery Products, Bloomingdale, Illinois: "When I got out of college I was an English major and not an engineer. As I look back there were several occasions when I was caught in engineering meetings and really didn't enjoy being considered the fool. Questions would be asked and I'd have to respond that 'I'll call you back later with the information you need.' I'd say that

probably 90 percent of reps — even those with engineering degrees — are faced with that same dilemma at one point in their sales careers. What can happen on occasion is that a rep will discover an opportunity for their principal. If they don't get all the information they need from the manufacturer from the outset, then gaining the order can be a very laborious process.”

Supporting Agents

It's just that sort of scenario that the battery manufacturer aims to avoid as it recently announced the addition to their staff of Andreiana Abramovich to head the Bloomingdale, Illinois, company's Battery Program Management.

Key to this appointment, according to Rendell, is the fact Abramovich will serve as a valuable asset that the company's network of independent agents can access as they identify opportunities in their respective territories. And from his perspective as someone who began his career in sales more than 40 years ago, Rendell maintains this is just the sort of asset that agents need. “We have to get our reps out there thinking about us every day and selling our products. What we're looking to accomplish is to identify new ways to put ourselves in front of our reps. Our goal here is to be able to put the customers' engineers together with our engineers and hash out any questions or problems immediately. What can result is that we're going to walk away with orders.”

Given her background, Abramovich would appear to be the ideal individual to provide agents and customers alike with the level of expertise that independent manufacturers look for in their principals. Reporting directly to Rendell, she will support the manufacturer as project lead in complex custom battery pack assemblies. From concept, quoting and design, through mass-production, she will engage with Zeus' agents and customers in each stage of custom pack projects. Abramovich points to more than 20 years of engineering and project management experience, 11 of those in the battery industry alone.

What does all this mean for Zeus and its network of independent manufacturers' representatives? Abramovich is quick to answer that “I have a history of working and communicating with Fortune 500 companies and reps. I know design, pricing and the assembly process. What I can bring to our reps and customers is my knowledge and availability. When a rep uncovers an opportunity, I'll be there — either on the phone or in person — to provide knowledge and stability.”

Providing Support

Rendell adds, “In the past there were occasions when we might have walked away from some opportunities simply because we didn't immediately have the expertise needed to make the sale. Now there are no opportunities that we're going to walk away from. This is really just about providing our reps with additional tools and more support so they can go out in the field and never feel threatened that they don't have the information they need to get the job done.”

To further put the company's new head of battery program management front and center in the reps' view, Rendell says Abramovich will take part in webinars where she'll be the guest speaker letting reps know what to look for. “Every time we conduct one of these webinars, it stirs things up for us and gets the attention we're looking for from the field.”

He adds that Abramovich is hardly a one-person show, however. “I don’t mean to sound as if our efforts are all about Andreiana and no one else. We have additional electrical engineers on staff who can jump on a plane and go out in the field to do the things that have to be done for our reps and customers. As an entire organization, we’re staffed with 35-40 people who are well-positioned to go out and land a lot of business for us and our reps. What it all comes down to is that we’re working together as a team to better serve the customer.”

Finally, Gina Galante, Zeus’ business development sales and marketing manager, notes, “From our vantage point, having Andreiana on our team is a huge step in further developing the trust we enjoy between ourselves and our reps. A number of the opportunities our reps identify have lengthy lead times, with custom-design products involving a great deal of circuitry and electronics. Having her available early on so she can work with customers and reps will further enhance our reputation with customers. This is all key to having our reps believe in us.”

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



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