

# **TOOLS OF OUR TRADE – Constructing a Successful Future**



**Update your toolbox at  
ERA's 2018 conference!**

To my fellow reps and our electronics industry manufacturer and distributor partners: My message is twofold but very straightforward. The rep sales model has been very, very good to me. And don't miss ERA's 49th Management and Marketing Conference in Austin, Texas, on Feb. 25-27, 2018.

It is a privilege to be serving as the chair of ERA's 2018 Conference Committee. And when I think about how I got here, I realize how fortunate I have been.

When I was very young, I planned on being an architect. I wanted to design skyscrapers. By my junior year in high school, however, I had committed to becoming an electrical engineer with the goal to design computers. After 10 years of RF and microwave engineering design work, I took my first position in sales. Little did I know at the time that I'd made a great decision. I worked in field sales for a manufacturer, then as a regional manager for a distributor.

After six years in sales, I bought a rep company. My wife was pregnant with our third child at the time, and I took out a second mortgage to pay the employees. I didn't pay myself for the first time until the business was five months old.

Buying that rep firm was the smartest business decision I ever made. I have been rewarded both financially and professionally, and I truly enjoy being a manufacturers' rep. As trite as it sounds, I feel like the best days are still ahead for those of us who are reps or who work in other segments of the electronics industry. The realistic side of me understands that this will be true only with hard work, by maintaining a commitment to improvement and change, and by dedicating our efforts to remain a strong sales organization.

I see a bright future in electronics sales. This is the core reason why I have become more involved with ERA in recent years. Through ERA, I can work with other reps, our partners in distribution and our firm's principals to make our business more efficient by using industry best practices. It is one of the most valuable uses of my time.

Plus, the ERA national conference allows all of us to tap the power of in-person collaboration and to reap its benefits. I have learned an incredible amount from past conferences, and I always leave with a commitment to specific actions that will result in improvement to my company's bottom line.

ERA's activities help drive me to improve my business's profitability. With a staff totally committed to serving our industry, ERA focuses on

enhancing the reputation of the rep model — not only via promotion, but more importantly by training and educating the membership. The national conference is the cornerstone of this effort and is always a do-not-miss event.

An incredibly talented team of 28 volunteers serving on five committees is bringing you this year's conference, themed "Tools of Our Trade — Constructing a Successful Future." This group represents the "power of three," with more distributors and manufacturers participating with reps than ever before. The collaboration among the committee members is inspiring as we all work together to deliver new and fresh program material that is pertinent, timely and a showcase for our industry's best practices.

It's time to update your toolbox! I urge you to join the expert presenters at the 2018 ERA Conference, and be ready to gain insights on key topics such as:

- the electronics industry customer and supplier of the future, including their impacts on your path to market and take-aways on how you should be retooling in order to stay relevant and useful;
- how to achieve better work-life balance, including tips and tools that both you and your personnel can use immediately;
- the national and global economic outlook, including practical advice to help you plan for your own company in 2018 and into 2019; and
- the changing, all-inclusive workforce of today, including tactics to find, hire, train and/



### About Rick LaPiana

*Richard LaPiana is president of Cain-Forlaw Company. Cain-Forlaw was established in 1971 by Robert Forlaw who retired in 1993. The company is headquartered in Arlington Heights, Ill., and currently operates in 18+ states in the central U.S. with six sales offices and 17 employees.*

*Prior to joining Cain-Forlaw, Rick worked in field sales with Penstock, a specialty distributor that was acquired by Avnet.*

*Rick also worked for Raytheon's, Microwave and Power Tube Division as a regional sales manager. He spent 10 years in systems engineering for Northrop-Grumman, Defense Systems Division, in Rolling Meadows, Ill.*

*He has a B.S.E.E. degree from Marquette University, in Milwaukee, Wis., and conducted post graduate studies at the Illinois Institute of Technology.*

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## COVER STORY: ERA 2018 Conference

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or work most effectively with diverse team members in your own company and your partner organizations.

There will be six breakout time slots this year — up from five at recent conferences — and you will have outstanding choices. The seminars will deliver tools to help you, your team and your company be more productive and increase your importance to your business partners while sharing your success with them. Among the breakouts will be: a sales techniques swap shop; a forum on design registration, why it's important and how it's impacting how we do business; a session on back-selling, including tips on how to showcase the value of the rep business model; an advanced Excel workshop; a seminar on how

to harness the “power of three,” i.e., reps, manufacturers and distributors; a workshop on how to best use Microsoft tools for sales collaboration; and a seminar on international customs, designed to help everyone who works with international companies better understand the business customs of key countries. I am confident that the topics will be so interesting that, as many past attendees have told us, you will have a tough time deciding which ones to attend.

We are a diverse organization in many ways, but we have the same formula for success. We range from one-person companies to huge global organizations. The products we sell, make or distribute may not overlap at all. The customers and markets we call on may be different. But the tools we need to grow sales are the same. This conference will demonstrate that we are more similar than different, and together we are stronger because we are all in the relationship business.

We all agree that the environment in which we sell continues to change. So the tools to survive and thrive need to be reviewed and updated regularly. Just as you will find at Home Depot or Lowe's, there are thousands of tools available depending on the job you are working. If you don't have the right tool, the job simply may not get done right ... or at all. That is how you should look at this conference.

Here's my personal example. Earlier this summer, we were hit with an incredible rainstorm that lasted several days and dumped more than a foot of rain. I live in a river valley, and the water table basically rose to where my window wells turned into frog ponds. Slowly the water leaked in and saturated the drywall in my basement. I needed to remove the bottom two feet of the drywall so that I could have a new French drain system installed. Someone suggested I use an oscillating tool to remove the drywall. I did not have any experience with this tool, but I heeded the advice and bought a Dremel Multimax mm30. Wow! It cut through the drywall like a knife through butter. My cuts were fast and straight, and I saved hours by using the right tool.

This is the experience that the ERA Conference Committee is diligently working to provide to conference attendees. Growing sales is totally about efficiency. Using the right tools will make you more efficient ... and profitable. It's clear to me that this is exactly what the talented conference volunteer team will provide in February.

I look forward to being with you in Austin. We will learn and have fun at the same time. ■

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