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Electronics Representatives Association

FALL 2019

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2020 ERA CONFERENCE

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Takin' It To The Streets

Succeeding In A Dynamic Market

Prepare for Success at the 2020 ERA Conference

2020 era CONFERENCE

by Neda Simeonova

For a fifth consecutive year, close to 400 electronics industry professionals are expected to gather at the AT&T Conference Center in Austin, Texas, for the Electronics Representatives Association (ERA) 51st Conference.

Scheduled Feb. 23-25, 2020, ERA's annual conference is the only opportunity for electronics industry reps, manufacturers, distributors and service providers to learn together from many experts and industry veterans in an environment dedicated to sharing practical, proven best practices in field sales and marketing.

The 2020 ERA Conference is designed around the theme "Takin' it to the Streets: Succeeding in a Dynamic Market," which according to Conference Committee Chair Mike Swenson, CPMR, Mel Foster Company, is "a metaphor for the core value of ERA and the field-level (street) activities that manufacturers' representatives are engaged in with customers, distributors and manufacturers to win business, deliver value and produce results."

This year's event focus emphasizes the importance of staying up to date on the latest sales tools and tactics, as well as the critical role of collaboration between reps, manufacturers and distributors in order to better serve customers and each other, and ultimately succeed in today's fast-changing market.

"ERA is excited to hold its 2020 ERA Conference at the AT&T Conference Center in Austin," said ERA CEO Walter E. Tobin. "The theme, 'Takin' it to the Streets: Succeeding in a Dynamic Market,' captures the uniqueness of our conference, which focuses on the dynamics of aligning the selling process and messaging from our manufacturers, through the reps and the distributors to the customer. It may sound simple, but to do this right requires a lot of partnership and alignment among all of us."

2020 program highlights

This year's ERA Conference Committee and Sub-Committees, consisting of more than 50 volunteers, have been hard at work to ensure that the 2020 ERA Conference delivers another outstanding program. From a highly energetic Keynote Speaker, to a unique and strong General Sessions lineup, to practical Breakout Sessions, to various networking events, this year's conference is sure to strengthen attendees' ability to rapidly adapt and respond to business disruptions while maintaining continuous and successful business operations.

Keynote speaker

The 2020 ERA Conference agenda will kick off on Monday, Feb. 24 with Keynote Speaker, Connie Podesta, award-winning author, former radio/TV personality, therapist, expert on the psychology of sales, leadership, change, accountability and engagement, and comedienne. Connie's do-not-miss presentation, "Stand Out from the Crowd … Out-Think, Out-Lead and Out-Sell the Competition," will bring out your edgy, creative, competitive side as she takes you inside the minds of today's savvy, but super-demanding global market and delivers some powerhouse strategies that will help you increase sales, profits, good will and your customer base. Competition – watch out! Business as usual? No way! Status quo? Move over? Change? Keep it coming!

"Connie's expertise in the psychology of human behavior as it relates to sales, leadership, relationships and getting-out-of-your-own-way-to-get-things-done fits this year's ERA conference theme like white-on-rice … and it cuts right down to the core of what it means to be a sales rep in this industry," said Conference Keynote Sub-Committee Chair, Michael Knight, SVP Business Development, President, TTI Semiconductor Group. "The way she read the keynote committee and positioned herself during the interview process was amazing. I quickly moved from wondering whether or not she would be a fit, to wondering how far we would need to go to get her to agree to keynote the conference, to wondering what it would take to get her to give up her speaking and book writing career in order to join the leadership team of my company. This is going to be a treat!"

> *The theme, " Takin' it to the Streets: Succeeding in a Dynamic Market," captures the uniqueness of our conference, which focuses on the dynamics of aligning the selling process and messaging from our manufacturers, through the reps and the distributors to the customer. It may sound simple, but to do this right requires a lot of partnership and alignment among all of us.*
> *— Walter Tobin, ERA CEO*

General sessions

The 2020 conference agenda will feature four general sessions, two on Monday, Feb. 24 and two on Tuesday, Feb. 25.

"We are thrilled to have put together a powerful line up of general sessions speakers for the upcoming ERA conference," Swenson said. "We have two great technology sessions on Electrifying Vehicles and IoT/AI/Blockchain for Embedded systems. This combined with a strong

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economic session and a strong speaker on sales/business leadership approaches will make this an impactful conference."

Economic outlook. Dr. Robert Genetski, one of the nation's leading classical economists who is known for using humor and anecdotes to make complex economic issues easily understandable, will present the Monday morning general session, "How Tariffs, China & the 2020 Election Will Impact the Economy." Genetski will assess the major threats to the economy leading up to the election and how these threats are likely to shape the business environment and financial markets. Takeaways from the session will include business strategies for dealing with China and tariffs as well as the consequences of the 2020 election.

Technology update. Industry leader and IoT Consultant Ali Sebt will present the Monday afternoon general session, "The Disruption of IoT: How the Forces of AI and Blockchain are Changing IoT and the New Opportunities that are Being Created."

Sebt has more than 30 years of experience in the high-tech industry where he held various roles including President & CEO of Renesas Electronics America. His session will provide insight into how the struggle of semiconductor companies to achieve organic growth on a holistic basis has resulted in M&As, and why the emergence of IoT was greeted with great fanfare as the "killer App" everyone was waiting for. However, before IoT was able to reach mass scale and bail out the industry, two disruptive forces — AI and Blockchain — have emerged as disruptors to IoT itself.

Sales and marketing. Sam Richter, an internationally recognized expert and speaker on sales, marketing and technology whose award-winning experience includes building innovative technology, sales and marketing programs for start-ups and some of the world's most famous brands, will present the Tuesday morning general session, "The Secrets to Sales Growth."

In this dynamic presentation, attendees will discover: How to find information in ways that you never thought possible including existing lead lists, inside information on companies and industries, and personal information on prospects and clients; how to use social media as a powerful sales and competitive "intelligence agent," and how to access the "Invisible Web" to find information that most think is not available online; and much more.

Closing general session. Michael Knight, president of the TTI Semiconductor Group and SVP of Business Development at TTI Inc., will once again deliver the conference closing general session, "The Electrifying Future of Transportation."

Attendees can expect to get a glimpse into the not-so-distant future where the news, and increasingly streets, are full of electric cars which are poised to become one of the biggest drivers of the electronics component industry as their production levels eclipse that of internal combustion engines. Beyond cars, all manner of transportation is moving to electric motors. If it rolls, floats or flies, it is in the process of being electrified and this presentation will examine the state of the current industry, associated timelines and projections, the ramifications for the electronic component supply chain, and the needs and technology enablers that are driving the evolution from fossil fuel to electric powered vehicles.

General Session Sub-Committee Co-Chair, Mark Conley, president and CEO of O'Donnell Associates North Inc., commented on the 2020 ERA Conference general session topics and speakers: "As part of the general session conference planning team, it was truly enriching to evaluate speakers from all over and determine which of them had pertinent ideas and takeaways for our unique audience. I'm very pleased with the speaker panel that we have chosen as each has a different perspective on our business and I am sure our conference attendees will enjoy the speakers as much as we enjoyed carefully choosing them."

Breakout sessions

"The breakout sessions committee has been collaborating to ensure session content addresses the most relevant topics for our industry, in a way that is interactive and solutions based," said Breakout Sessions Sub-Committee Co-Chair, Amy Hain, director, Global Accounts, for RFMW Ltd. "We are thrilled to see it all coming together, and are looking forward to a conference that provides clear and tangible value to ERA members."

Conference attendees can pick from 16 different breakout session topics including: M&A; swap shop; best practices for onboarding a new manufacturer, distributor and rep; succession planning, diversity and retention; website development; profile of the successful rep-manufacturer relationship; management styles; blockchain; and much more.

For more information about the upcoming 2020 ERA Conference or to register, visit **https://era.org/era-events/era-conference/**. ■

Kingsland Coombs, CPMR, CSP
President and Owner
Control Sales Inc.

With so many ERA members, it is not easy to get to know every rep, manufacturer and distributor in the business. "Someone You Should Know" is The Representor *department that gives readers the chance to learn about fellow ERA members, including how their time is spent both in and out of the office.*

Meet Kingsland Coombs, CPMR, CSP, President and Owner of Control Sales Inc., a manufacturers' representative organization servicing Northern Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa.

The Representor *asked Kingsland a few questions about his time in the electronics rep business and his experiences with ERA. Here is what he had to say.*

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I am a CompEng graduate from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign where I was lucky enough to also play four years of club hockey. I cut my teeth in sales working for Motorola in the semiconductor group. As a rep, my earliest success came in the mid-90s selling power supplies to Motorola when they dominated the cell phone market. I have had the pleasure of being the president and owner of Control Sales since 2015.

What are some things you enjoy outside of the workplace?

Our family life has revolved around our four sons for some time now, and it has been our greatest joy. Now that they are older, I enjoy working out, playing tennis and golf, and occasionally sampling the latest craft beer. I am also a huge Chicago sports fan and love going to games, especially the Cubs and Blackhawks.

We had an amazing trip to Austria and the Czech Republic in March visiting our third son who was studying abroad. We can't wait to go back and explore more of Europe.

How long have you been an ERA member and how long in the rep business?

I joined my father's rep business Coombs Associates in 1992 and personally became an ERA member in 1999.

How did you become interested in being a rep in the electronics industry?

I suppose it may have always been in the back of my mind since my father, Sam Coombs, was a rep. He founded Coombs Associates in 1970. He was a very intelligent man with a contagious enthusiasm for electronics. He encouraged me to pursue a computer engineering degree and to work at Motorola. From there, I suppose the entrepreneurial, risk/reward aspect of owning and managing a component rep firm appealed to me.

What have you found to be most rewarding about the rep business?

For me, the greatest reward comes from our most fundamental task – working with engineers and solving problems. I love engaging with a customer, digging into their technology and brainstorming solutions to their design challenges. I love to compete, fairly and honestly, against other suppliers and win new business. Nothing else is quite like it for me. Since I have been doing this a long time, I now have the privilege of enjoying long-term relationships with some brilliant people who I deeply respect and admire.

Briefly describe your rep firm.

Control Sales is a 10-person firm with offices in Schaumburg, Ill., and Brookfield, Wisc. We specialize in selling electromechanical components to mid- and large-sized OEM customers. Our primary territory is Illinois and Wisconsin with a few lines servicing Iowa and Minnesota.

What recent innovations, best practices and/or changes has your firm made?

We have been focused on data analytics for some time now, and I expect our focus to increase. Using our CRM, Excel pivot tables and Power BI, we can see our business at a granular level and analyze larger trends. Our data tools create and analyze first-time buy reports, generate targeted marketing lists, track commissions around the world, and help influence our decision making. We have also dramatically improved our internal communications by implementing Office 365 with a focus on Teams and SharePoint.

What have you learned and/or what contacts have you made through ERA that have had the greatest positive impacts on you and/or your business?

The contacts and peer network I have gained from the ERA have been amazing. For instance, my relationship with Bob Evans of EK Micro as a friend and mentor largely grew through many years of ERA events. The Chicagoland-Wisconsin Chapter has vibrant membership with a commitment to quality programs, events and giving back to the greater good. I always learn something I can use and can trace back many of my best practices to ERA discussions. As we enter a period of potentially dynamic change from IoT and Industry 4.0, it is critical to be a part of a strong industry and best practices group.

I have been honored and happy to serve on the ERA Conference Committee and as a co-chair of the 2019 Keynote Speaker and 2020 Breakout Sessions Sub-Committees.

Are you active on social media? Do you follow ERA? Have ERA updates via social media been helpful to you?

I am active on social media and looking to grow my presence. I follow ERA on LinkedIn and plan to continue sharing useful content and start some relevant conversations in the ERA LinkedIn group in 2020.

What is one interesting fact that people may not know about you?

The name Kingsland has been in my family for generations. Family lore is that it can be traced back to a land grant from the King of England after the battle of Hastings in 1066. Can't say for sure. There is a city block named Kingsland near Brooklyn, N.Y., I have a Kingsland ancestor who fought in the revolutionary war. I had a nun in middle school who refused to call me Kingsland ("King") without a note from my mother. All things being equal, my name stands out when meeting people, which never hurts in sales!

by Neda Simeonova

RISING STARS IN THE ELECTRONICS INDUSTRY

Unemployment in the U.S. is at an all-time low, dropping down to 3.5 percent in September 2019 from 3.7 percent in the previous month. In fact, the last time the rate was this low was in December 1969, when it was also 3.5 percent. Over the month, the number of unemployed persons decreased by 275,000 to 5.8 million, and total nonfarm payroll employment rose by 136,000 in September, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Yet, young professions continue to report issues with employment, professional growth and job satisfaction. They struggle to engage and align passion with career path or find balance between career and personal life. These challenges typically result in frequent position and company changes. This is echoed in a recent Gallup report which reveals that 21 percent of millennials say they have changed jobs within the past year, which is more than three times the number of non-millennials who report the same. According to Gallup, the millennial employment turnover costs the U.S. economy $30.5 billion annually.

On the flip side, young professionals also bring a breadth of knowledge and unique technical skillset that are key to company growth. They are not simply technology users; they are technology assimilators. Young professionals live through virtual social circles and interactions. "From facilitating communication across distances to utilizing new digital solutions in the workplace, the opportunities provided by technology are endless, and it's the young adults of the millennial generation that know this and are positioned to harness its full potential," said Gabriel De Diego Zori, HR planning and strategy director at Madrid-based Telefónica.

By the end of 2020, young professionals will make up 46 percent of the workforce, according to a study by the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flager Business School. While there may be some large differences between the newest group of young professionals and the previous generations of workers, it is key for companies and managers to learn how to understand these differences and work styles, and nurture their strengths in order to help propel the next generation of leaders.

To gain a better insight into how young professionals in the electronics industry have turned challenges into opportunities and ensured continued success, we interviewed two Rising Stars — Bryan Teen, President of Tech Marketing, and Kara Prentoski, OEM Account Manager at Brainard-Nielsen Marketing Inc. Teen and Prentoski shared some key challenges they encountered as they embarked on their career journey in the electronics industry and steps they have taken to establish a successful career. Here is what they had to say:

Bryan Teen, President Tech Marketing

Please provide a little background about yourself.

My name is Bryan Teen, and I am the President at Tech Marketing. We are a manufacturers' representative firm based in Raleigh, N.C., that covers the Carolinas and Dixie states. I received my CPMR certification this year which was a great experience. I currently serve on the Carolinas ERA BOD, and volunteer on the 2020 ERA Conference Committee. I have been married for five years, and I have a two-and-a-half-year-old son named Walter. He has some big shoes to fill though, as I am sure all of you reading this can attest to the fact that you've never met a Walter you didn't like! I am a graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill and have learned several leadership skills from my experience becoming an Eagle Scout.

How long have you worked in the electronics industry?

Our company was founded in 1995, and I have been on board since 2005 after graduating college. I started out as inside sales before moving to Charlotte to become an account manager and working remote. I eventually moved back to Raleigh to take on a sales manager role, before being promoted to VP of sales. I have now taken over the company as president, and I am in the process of purchasing the company.

What made you choose this industry as your current career path?

Like a lot of other younger reps in the electronics industry, my father Patrick started Tech Marketing almost 25 years ago. Although I originally was considering going to law school, by the time I graduated I was ready to get a job. After careful discussion with my dad, we both decided to give it a shot. My dad and I are very similar and can be passionate in our views, so it was important that no matter what, we would never let business negatively affect our relationship. Almost 15 years later, I am happy to say that we are probably closer than we have ever been. I am very appreciative that he gave me an opportunity 15 years ago, and that he believes in me enough to allow me to buy the company he started and continue our success into the future.

As a young professional what are some of the main challenges you encountered as you embarked on your career journey in the industry?

When I started in 2005, I was 23 and to me, I felt I was the youngest person in the entire industry. I am sure that was not the truth, but that is how it felt at the time. My memory may be tainted by this feeling, but I don't recall the influx of young professionals that we have now.

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CHAPTER AD

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Early on, I remember looking at my colleagues and feeling overwhelmed that they had these 25+ year relationships with customers and colleagues in the industry. It was likely more difficult to develop friendships with customers who were married with kids as we were in different places in our lives. Being older now, I realize that was likely not the case. It did motivate me at the time as I felt I had to work a little harder to make up for my lack of experience. Obviously, there was also a learning curve on the different technologies, personalities and functions of the sales process. I also did not have the experience of living through the history of our industry that were shared experiences for others.

What are some steps that you have taken to overcome these challenges and to ensure that you can establish and nurture a successful career?

I learned a lot from my dad early in my career. Becoming active in our local ERA chapter was one of the best ways to overcome these shortcomings. Traveling and going on sales calls with more experienced colleagues was also a benefit. Bob Ball and Bob Kirkland spent time with me and took me on many of their sales calls early on. Going on buddy calls with distributor partners taught me a lot and helped develop relationships. I still have fond memories of being brand new to the industry, and the kindness that fellow BOD members Penny Hoglund and Buzz Reynolds showed me. It may not have seemed significant to them, but it meant a lot to me at the time. I would read any book that was recommended to me and was always sure to circle back with that person after completing. I also can't recommend the CPMR program enough, especially if you are a rep owner or plan on becoming a rep owner. Attending EDS and national sales meetings was also a great way to meet other reps from across the country. Those relationships have proven to be extremely valuable.

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Out of change and chaos comes opportunity

by Walter E. Tobin
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Our industry is experiencing a lot of changes just since Aug. 1 — a new global distribution association is being formed, a major semiconductor manufacturer is terminating a global distributor, another semiconductor manufacturer is deciding to "go direct" and away from the rep model in almost all of its North American markets, etc. So much change in such a short amount of time, right?

Wrong!

When did our industry NOT experience change? We have experienced change since the formation of the manufacturers' rep model, the development and formalization of franchise agreements with distribution and the rise of a multitude of electronic component manufacturers.

We have experienced change since the formation of the manufacturers' rep model, the development and formalization of franchise agreements with distribution and the rise of a multitude of electronic component manufacturers.

Distribution went through a tremendous consolidation beginning in 1980 with two major distributors acquiring over 50 other distributors over the next 30 years or so. Do you think consolidation in the channel is over? Not at all! There will be continued mergers and acquisitions (M&A) moving forward as distributors continue to move into new geographies and garner new franchises via acquisition ... so stay tuned!

The manufacturers continue to go through tremendous merger activities in order to acquire new technologies via buying another manufacturer versus developing the technology internally. This merger activity allows for a quicker time-to-market timeline and a boost to shareholder value.

What about the reps? They are also experiencing their own M&A activities due to their desire for larger geographic territories or the desire to gain access to additional manufactures via buying another rep company versus trying to add manufacturers one at a time. Once again, time to market and a quick ROI is driving this activity.

But wait! Is there any downside to all this M&A activity? Of course.

The first impact is the toll that it has on the people — our fellow industry citizens. One of the main goals of any merger or acquisition is to try and capture the combined revenues of both organizations while eliminating the redundant expense. Sort of a nice antiseptic way of saying to lay off people.

Another area that needs to be sorted through is technology or manufacturer conflict. When a distributor acquires another distributor, there are manufacturers who will not "share the shelf" with one of their competitors. Thus, they may terminate the new combined company. Same is true when a manufacturer acquires another manufacturer. There may be a small/medium area of conflict that needs to be rationalized internally.

Manufacturer mergers have had a major impact on the manufacturers' rep network. Manufacturer A buys manufacturer B; there is a rep "bake off" between the A's rep and B's rep; however, the manufacturer wants to choose rep A but they have manufacturer C that has a SMALL conflict with manufacture A. If the chosen rep wants to get/keep manufacturer A/B, they need to terminate manufacturer C – even if C represents a major source of revenue to them and the conflict is so small so to perhaps not even matter in that particular territory! So conflict has been a major product of all of this M&A activity.

Perhaps the biggest impact of the M&A activity has been on the customer. Does anyone even think of the impact on perhaps the most-important person in our industry? Our customers do not like surprises or change They like predictability and consistency. When a rep, distributor or manufacturer changes the sales/engineering coverage of a customer, it usually causes a near-long-term impact on the customer. Some customers work through the changes and in fact may become a stronger or more loyal customer to the new entity. Others may decide to "vote with their feet" and walk

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Takin' It To The Streets

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And perhaps the rep ...

by Chuck Tanzola, CPMR
The Fusion Sourcing Group Inc.
ERA President
ctanzola@fusionsourcing.com

Certain dates in our history stand out for their collective significance: Nov. 19, 1863 (Somewhat more than four score and seven years ago, but greatly noted and long remembered for a 270 word speech delivered on the hallowed grounds of Gettysburg.); Dec. 7, 1941 ("... A day that shall live in infamy ..."); Aug. 28, 1963 ("I have a dream ..."); July 20, 1969 ("... One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind ..."); and of course, Sept. 11, 2001 ... (Do you remember where you were when ...?)

Other dates are personally significant; but likely not as universally remembered. For example, do you recall Nov. 10, 1977? Maybe not. But I do. I remember sitting in the audience, a wide-eyed and impressionable freshman, listening to Frank HT Rhodes inaugural address, entitled, "*... And Perhaps Cornell*" as he was installed as the ninth president of Cornell University.

Our industry is experiencing an ongoing period of accelerating change, disruptive sales technologies and volatile events that have led some over time to diminish the essence, value and distinctive character of the rep.

I remember Rhodes recalling a story from Cornell historian Morris Bishop; who detailed a critical review of American Higher Education by a foreign author who "claimed that only a few American institutions were places of any great distinction." The only "typical American colleges," the author concluded, were "Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and perhaps Cornell." Bishop continued, "Had he sought pure examples of the great popular American university, [...], he would have mentioned Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio State and California. And perhaps Cornell." Bishop lamented, "Perhaps Cornell! It has always been the fate of our University to be Perhaps Cornell!"

Rhodes went on to state, "... I wonder if those words haunt you as they haunt me. Perhaps Cornell. Perhaps Cornell. And they haunt me not as ... judgment of our past but as a challenge and a hope for our future."

I wonder, in a critical review of the electronics industry if some foreign author might say, "Companies that excel in reaching their customers going forward will do so through the extensive use of SEO and social media; global distribution strategies; artificial intelligence; and perhaps a network of manufacturers' reps."

He might continue, "The best market information is found in the big data contained in end to end CRM systems; collected through responsive web sites; monitored in sophisticated lead scoring systems; and perhaps from manufacturers' reps."

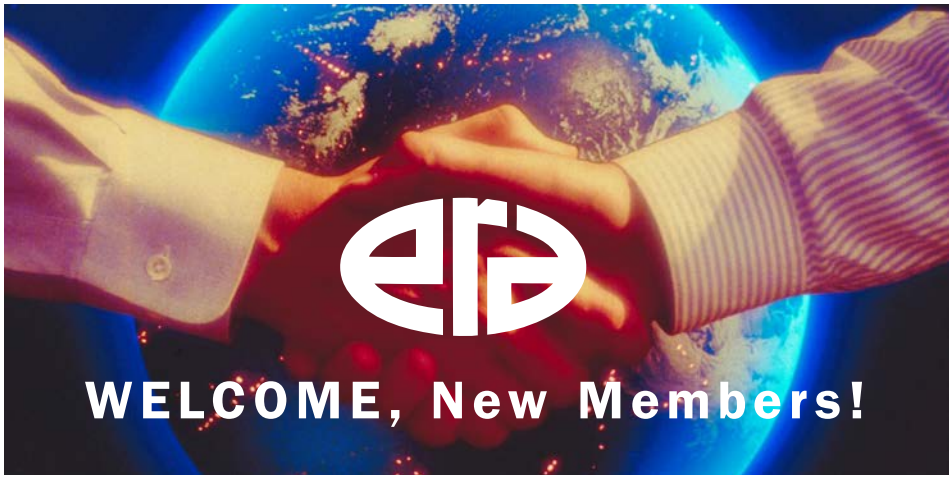
Perhaps the rep! Is it the fate of our profession to be "Perhaps the rep!"? Our industry is experiencing an ongoing period of accelerating change, disruptive sales technologies and volatile events that have led some over time to diminish the essence, value and distinctive character of the rep. Do these words haunt you as they haunt me?

Perhaps the rep! Should we allow a rapidly changing market to relegate us to accept an industry position of, "Perhaps the Rep"? Or should we take this as an exhortation to embrace changes; responding to the challenges they represent head on. I think the latter.

Perhaps the Rep! Should we shy away from new technologies that threaten to subject us to a long term position of, "Perhaps the Rep!"? Or should we develop a kinship and expertise with these technologies – eliminating any suspicion they could adequately render the role of the rep as secondary. I think the latter.

Perhaps the Rep! Should we allow industry volatility to subject us to always be, "Perhaps the Rep!"? Or is this a time for "Carpe Diem", seizing the day and the opportunity inherent in the disruptive changes in our

(continued on page 30)



These companies joined ERA since July 2019.

(The ERA chapter of each rep firm is listed in italics after the company name.)

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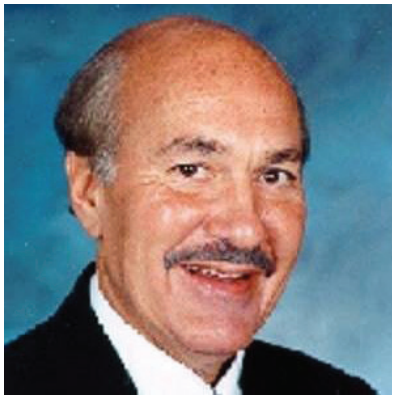
Life after the rep business

Our next two ERA notables are truly amazing men! As an example, when I called Jim Houck, a celebrated second-generation rep from Maryland, his wife said, "Sorry Harry, he's out playing tennis!" Point being, he's the same energetic guy at 86 who gets up early every morning just as he did during his selling days. Incidentally, please note the portrait of Jim's dad in the background of his photo. He lived to over 100, a true rep centurion. Obviously, Jim and his father come from a special gene pool.

Our second ERA icon profiled in this issue is Russ Diethert, one of the most celebrated reps that our association has ever had. His many contributions started in the Chicagoland-Wisconsin Chapter and then onto ERA national. He did it all! He is also the first Hall of Famer that I have encountered who retired from repdom and went on to a successful second career. How is that for energy and drive?

I must admit that I am taken back by the extraordinary men whose bios have graced this column. If any readers feel that a fellow ERA man or woman is worthy of recognition in our publication, please do not hesitate to share their name and contact information with me.

— Harry J. Abramson



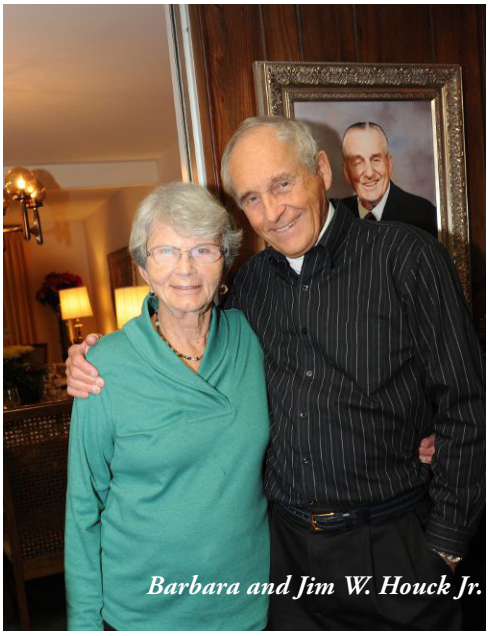
by Harry J. Abramson
Founder (Retired)
Electronic Salesmasters Inc.

Harry Abramson founded Electronic Salesmasters Inc. in 1972. He established industry notoriety by virtue of his firm's peak performance, hundreds of articles and speaking appearances at ERA's national conferences and chapter meetings and sister trade association MANA. He has an electrical engineering degree from Temple University and entered the electronics industry as an engineer at RCA in Camden, N.J.

His ERA involvement includes serving as vice president of the Components Group and president of the Ohio Chapter. Under his leadership, the chapter was awarded the National Chapter of the Year Award. Abramson recently was recognized with ERA's prestigious Life Membership Award.

You can reach Harry J. Abramson at 216-406-4119 or email him at hja725@yahoo.com.

Where is James 'Jim' W. Houck Jr. now …



Barbara and Jim W. Houck Jr.

I am a young 86 year old, born in Frederick, Md., on July 4 (same birth date as my mother). My wife Barbara of 63 years and I have four married children.

My dad was already in the electronics world as a buyer at Bendix Radio in Towson, Md., until after the war. In 1948, he fortuitously went into the rep business. Some early lines were Price Electric, Sarkes Tarzian, Times Wire & Cable and Eastern Devices. They launched dad onto a very successful career path. He was also instrumental in forming the Chesapeake Chapter in 1958.

After proudly serving in the U.S. Marine Corps as a Second Lieutenant, Communications Specialist, I was honorably discharged. In 1960, I joined my father's company. When our firm was appointed to represent Micro Networks and I was successful in three huge design wins at Westinghouse Defense; needless to say, it became our largest line. I then followed my father's footsteps by becoming active at the local level. I went through the chairs and became chapter president in 1975 and ultimately served on the ERA Board of Directors.

I attended outstanding conferences in many spectacular places which gave me the opportunity to form many lifelong friendships. This resulted in obtaining many excellent principals. My ERA heroes were Ray Hall, Gerry Newman, Stan Herzog and John Doyle. Ray was a great CEO and a wonderful mentor. I only had the pleasure of meeting Walt Tobin when he visited our chapter meeting. The aforementioned aside, my favorite contact at ERA is Karin Derkacz who would bend over backwards to help on any occasion. She's a gem! And of course, Tess Hill.

After dad retired, in 1981, I formed Walker-Houck Associates, a third-generation firm, which included my daughter, Janet, and son, Jim Houck III. I'm honored to boast, my son also joined the U.S. Marine Corps and served our country in Okinawa as a crypto-communications officer.

(continued on page 22)

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Conley & Associates
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Crossroads Electronic Marketing
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407-718-1690

Current Solutions
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aljr@currentsolutions.com
813-996-1922

Graham Performance Tech LLC
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HHP Associates Inc.
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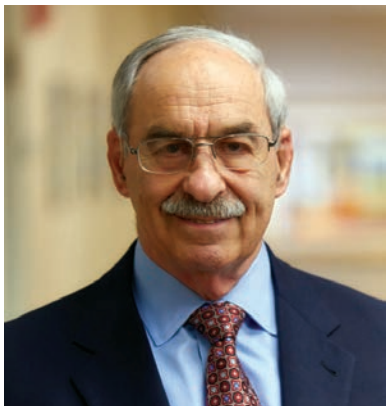
Discovery maneuvering is often aimed at wearing down reps in commission actions



by Gerald M. Newman
ERA General Counsel

Gerald M. Newman and Adam J. Glazer are partners in the law firm of Schoenberg Finkel Newman & Rosenberg LLC, and they serve as general counsel to ERA. They are also regular contributors to The Representor*, and participate in Expert Access, the program that offers telephone consultations to ERA members.*

You can call Gerry Newman or Adam Glazer at 312-648-2300 or send email to gerald.newman@sfnr.com or adam.glazer@sfnr.com.

Adam Glazer
ERA General Counsel

Ordinarily, this column explores legal avenues available to protect the interests of independent sales reps, the willingness of courts to travel down such avenues, or both. Sometimes, however, developing an appropriate legal theory and filing a lawsuit (or arbitration demand) can prove the easy part.

As experienced litigants know, it is in the discovery process — the obtaining of written or electronic information and witness testimony — where cases are usually won or lost.

So rather than focus on the commission recovery theories, this edition of "Legally Speaking" examines a very recent and not atypical judicial look at certain litigation tactics aimed at defending against a commission recovery case through aggressive discovery efforts. Fortunately, by refusing to cave to the principal's aggressive tactics, the rep largely prevailed.

Relevant factual background

Controlled Kinematics Inc., or CKI, represents manufacturers of precision motion control solutions. Its principal, Novanta Corporation, supplies photonics and motion control components to OEMs in the advanced industrial technology markets.

CKI and MicroE Systems Inc. signed a rep contract in 2002. Novanta acquired MicroE in 2004, and entered into a new written contract with CKI in 2014.

The 2014 agreement added a new term, specifying that, following termination, CKI would get commissioned on purchase orders it presented to Novanta prior to the effective date of termination, and Novanta accepted within the 12-month period immediately following the effective date of termination.

Another principal represented by CKI was Applimotion, which Novanta acquired in 2015. CKI and Applimotion had no written contract. On the combined business, CKI was now earning commissions from Novanta totaling $1 million annually, painting a huge target on its back.

Come summer 2015, Novanta sought to lower CKI's commission rate. When the negotiations dragged on without a deal, Novanta dug in and informed CKI it would no longer recognize the unwritten contractual relationship on the Applimotion business, and it withheld commissions due.

Novanta's resentment continued to grow. Claiming its inherited sales rep was "doing essentially nothing" to earn its sizeable commissions, in June 2016, it terminated CKI "without cause." Yet, Novanta also asserted that CKI was courting its competitors during 2016 and set up a directly competing business.

Relying on the 12-month payout period in the written 2014 rep agreement, CKI sought commissions on MicroE products for the last quarter of 2016. Novanta refused to pay, invoking a claim familiar to many reps whose principals decide to change sales strategies: that it, not CKI, drove the sales. Principals in financial trouble, experiencing a change in management, or preparing to change to a direct salesforce, are sometimes tempted to look at their longtime, hugely successful rep partners and abruptly decide they are no longer earning their commissions.

The ensuing court fight

CKI had little alternative but to take Novanta to court. An action to recover unpaid commissions was filed in the Boston federal court. To no surprise, Novanta decided it may as well counterclaim, and devised dubious contract theories against CKI, including that it wasn't working hard enough and that it improperly represented a competitor.

In pursuit of its unlikely claims, Novanta served broad and overbearing discovery requests upon CKI centered around two topics: 1) the activities of its employees, and

(continued on next page)

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2) its work and preparation to work for a competitor. Naturally, CKI objected to such requests. Novanta then filed a motion to compel CKI to respond.

Probing the extent of the rep's sales efforts

With respect to its first pursuit, Novanta served an expansive request for all documents showing "what CKI and its principals and employees were doing on a daily basis in 2015 and 2016," and argued this information was directly relevant to its defense that CKI did not earn the post-termination commissions at issue. Invoking the MicroE contract terms calling for CKI to "diligently and actively promote, sell, support, install, and maintain" MicroE products, Novanta urged the court to compel its production.

CKI argued the requests went well beyond the limited scope of discovery, and the judge largely agreed. She noted that the request "is nearly limitless because any company document and all of the phone and computer records of CKI principals and employees could be interpreted as 'showing what CKI and its principals and employees were doing on a daily basis.'"

A plain reading of the request even called for CKI to produce records showing what its personnel were doing outside of work, which went "well beyond" the scope of the litigation. Novanta either intentionally exceeded the reasonable limits of discovery or didn't much worry about standards of reasonableness when the effect was to burden its former sales rep with cumbersome discovery demands. Seems they agreed with Clint Eastwood in one of his early Westerns, "Man With No Name," when he muttered: "I tried being reasonable. I didn't like it."

Arguably, these tactics were partially rewarded when Novanta obtained a highly questionable discovery ruling, the possible result of a court attempting to give both parties something. CKI was ordered to produce documents supporting its sales efforts in 2015 and 2016, even though the contractual obligation to pay commissions did not appear directly tied to such efforts. Additionally, such documents were highly unlikely to contain relevant information enabling a fair measurement of the quality and quantity of sales efforts, an inherently subjective determination.

Seeking discovery on work for the competition

CKI admitted during the litigation that it spoke with a Novanta competitor, Allied Motion, prior to its termination, but denied actually representing Allied until months after its termination. This was consistent with the contract. However, to test this claim, Novanta served discovery requests related to: 1) communications CKI had with any customer or prospective customer of Novanta, and 2) all communications with Allied Motion concerning sales representation. The time range began with the notice of termination, but contained no end date.

CKI objected to producing information about communications it had with customers after termination about its new principal, Allied Motion, as "intended to be harassing and to interfere in CKI's contractual relations." Novanta responded that its request was relevant to assessing whether CKI complied with its contractual obligation to "diligently and actively promote, sell, support, install and maintain" the MicroE products, and the restriction on representing competitors.

The court again agreed with CKI that the request was overbroad, ruling that disputing how CKI spent its time while earning commissions does not enable Novanta "to seek discovery on everything CKI was doing during that time." Further, inquiring about CKI's communications with customers or potential customers about Allied Motion "is not probative of whether it 'diligently' or 'actively' promoted or sold" MicroE products. The court thus streamlined the request, including by adding an appropriate end date.

Similar objections were made by CKI to seeking its communications with Allied Motion about representation and the court issued a similar ruling, deeming the Novanta request overbroad due to a lack of time constraints. Notably, the court again tried to split the discovery baby to a certain extent by compelling production of documents reflecting CKI's work — limited to during 2016 — on the grounds that work performed during this period "may be relevant to determining whether CKI upheld its duties under the contract."

After expensive and time-consuming briefing on the discovery disputes, CKI's incomplete wins were less than it deserved. Alas, this comprises a fairly common outcome. The reality is, as Clint Eastwood reveals in his last Western, the Oscar-winning Unforgiven, "Deserve's got nothing to do with it." ■

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I'm blessed to have traveled to 28 countries. My hobbies are many including coin collecting, matchbooks, Pepsi cans and bottles, bird eggs and beach sands. My sporting interests include swimming (three miles, longest five in Chesapeake Bay), year-round tennis (two to three times a week), scuba diving and skiing in Switzerland, Japan and Canada.

I am indebted to my circle of rep friends and colleagues that included: Tony Faiola, Dave Myers, Bruce Joseph, Richard Shor, Tom Teal, Bob Barnhill, Robert Wilkinson, Gene Rosen and Dick Tidings.

I truly miss my ERA contacts and our association.

Where is Russ Diethert now …


Russ Diethert

I sit here today, at 77, having totally redefined my definition of old age once again. I still feel that is something in the distant future. Fortunately, I feel like a middle aged man who possesses the life and business experiences of a 77 year old. It's great to be able to sit back and recall milestone memories like when I was 26. I was in Vietnam and my dad sent me 26 birthday cards and it took almost 26 days for me to get them all.

When Harry called and asked if I would write something about myself for *The Representor,* I was honored and humbled. I've always felt humble about my ERA involvement. Probably because I gained so much from that wonderful experience. Going to meetings, conferences and board rooms put me next to many of the masters of the art of being a multiple line manufacturers' rep, and boy, did I pick brains!

I can't tell my story without telling you of my greatest gift. I am the son of Russell S. Diethert (1953 ERA President) who was one of the early reps in Chicago back when we were "The Representatives." He mastered the art of synergistic selling before it was chronicled by Jack Berman. My dad started in the early 40s after working for another company that went out of business. He figured he couldn't do any worse on his own. Boy, was he right.

By the early 50s and through the 60s, he represented every item it took to make a capacitor. I mean plastic cans, metal cans, paper, foil, tab stock and rubber seals. He even received a patent for designing a motor start capacitor cover with molded in tab inserts. You see, back then, Illinois, Indiana and New England were the capacitor manufacturing centers. He turned his patent over to one of his principals in exchange for the right to sell their parts to anyone in the business. That led to an office in the Carolinas because capacitor companies began building plants there. That was the first move for them before going offshore.

When I started in the business in 1963, Illinois was still an appliance and TV manufacturing hub. Sunbeam appliance had plants covering almost two city blocks. Not one person today.

Reps have had to become masters at adapting to change with "offshore manufacturing" being the biggest one. It wasn't so bad when they just moved to the Carolinas.

ERA staff and volunteers worked hard to provide tools to help our members continue to adapt and add credibility to our membership. The Certified Professional Manufacturers' Representative (CPMR) program was a great example of that. I was glad to be involved during that development and became a CPMR at Arizona State. I think we were the first class there.

My story is not much different than many others who have devoted 40 years to this business and ERA. I purchased the business from my father in 1970. I purchased another firm in 1975 and merged with another in 1985 to form LTD Technologies. In 2002, after my partner and staff voted to merge with another firm, I decided to phase out, which I did in June of 2003.

I had such great experiences on the Chicagoland-Wisconsin Chapter board, the ERA Board of Directors, the EXCOM, the MIDCON show board, the EDS show board and the Grayhill rep council. I was extremely honored to receive the ERA Hall of Fame prestigious award in 1993. I have a memory

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End the boring sales meetings

by Nicki Weiss
Certified Professional Sales Management Coach and Master Trainer

In the past few months, I've sat through a series of unbelievably boring sales meetings. Even though they were held in different organizations, they all followed a similar pattern:

- The president/sales leader stood in front of the room and yakked about numbers, internal policies, his latest ideas to improve sales, and ended with an exhortation to "go get 'em."
- The salespeople were either mute or asked some type of administrative question, such as "How can we get the shipping department to respond more quickly to our orders?"
- After the ordeal was over, salespeople muttered to each other about "useless meetings" and management complained about the lack of enthusiasm among the troops.

No wonder everyone was dissatisfied. Nobody had interacted during the meeting, and more to the point, no meaningful conversation had taken place.

Excuse me, was I snoring too loudly?

Whatever happened to engaging everyone in a little reflection about what we do and how we do it? In our hurry to produce, produce, produce, we seldom stop to reflect on what's worked, what hasn't and what we've learned.

How can we get smarter if we don't build on our past experience?

I suggest incorporating time into each of your sales meetings for some dialogue and reflection. You just might stifle the yawns, engage your team in some worthwhile discussion and find ways to work smarter and faster. Here are some hints on how to get the juices flowing.

Shake up the brain links

Pose a typical sales question to the team. For example: How can we grow by 20 percent every year? How can we uncover new opportunities within our current account base?

Then, and this is the most important part, open up the discussion with a "whack on the side of the head" follow-up question — the kind that shakes your team out of their assumptions and clears the brain for new answers. I use two great resources for "whack" questions: "The Creative Whack Pack" by Roger von Oech (available in bookstores and on Amazon) and Michael Bungay Stanier's "Get Unstuck and Get Going" (available at: **www.boxofcrayons.biz/books-products/get-unstuck-and-get-going/**).

An example from Get Unstuck and Get Going: Read this short poem: "Barn's burnt down. Now I can see the moon." Then ask the group: "What's the 'barn' or 'big obstacle' that's in your way? What can you see behind it?"

Talk about the team's hopes and nightmares

Alternatively, you could lead the team through a reflective thinking exercise. Ask about each individual's best hope for solving a work situation, and what factors support this optimistic outcome. Then ask about their worst nightmare scenario around the situation and the factors that support pessimism. You'll find that people's insights are quite profound.

Start the meeting with silence

I've attended meetings that started with two minutes of silent contemplation, and observed how powerful silence can be. I've also seen facilitators ask people to stop talking and just be silent for a minute when a meeting gets heated. It's amazing how a few moments for pause and reflection can set a thoughtful tone.

Pose a 'take-away' reflection

At the end of the meeting, ask the participants to ponder a question and report their thoughts at the next meeting. Here are a few of my favorites:

- What does the concept of being powerful mean to you?
- How do you give your power away? To whom? When?
- What does it mean to work collaboratively as a team?
- What is present when we as a team are great?
- When do we take our foot "off the gas"?

When we add reflection into our daily work, we become more resilient, flexible and creative. Please stop hosting boring meetings. Or, if you are a captive in such a meeting, politely pose a reflective question and see what happens.

Nicki Weiss is President and Co-founder of the SalesWise Academy (www.saleswise-academy.com), an innovative online sales development program designed for sales leaders and teams that sell technical or complex products and services with long selling cycles. SalesWise Academy trains more effectively by teaching the way adults learn best, in frequent, "bite-sized" lessons, delivered via 10-minute audio podcasts and support materials to members' inboxes every two weeks.

Nicki is ERA's sales consultant, the brainchild and facilitator of ERA's free teleforum programs. To learn more, go to saleswise.ca or call 416-778-4145.

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ADVERTISEMENT

by Jackie Mattox

Why your personal brand matters

Navigating your personal brand can be overwhelming. From taking the perfect professional headshot, polishing your LinkedIn profile, or fine-tuning your resume until it's "just right," there are seemingly endless elements to managing your brand. Oftentimes, however, we leave the most important aspect of our personal brand out of this equation—our outward perception. And here's why it matters.

Our perception drives responses. The way our actions and behaviors are interpreted by others reflects what we care about and also reinforces our personal brand in an impactful and meaningful way. A classic example involves meeting participation. While you're listening closely but refraining from adding your own thoughts and ideas to the conversation, your fellow colleagues may perceive lack of verbal response as lack of interest (and often do). Leaving others to assume what matters to you may cause your personal brand to become an inaccurate representation of your true self. Instead, hop in the driver's seat and make your passions known. When it comes to managing your career, by consistently telling others what you find fulfilling and what you want to achieve professionally, you might be surprised by the opportunities that come your way. Openings for relevant positions that wouldn't have found their way to you before will appear front and center, all because you made a conscious choice to take control of your personal brand.

When your outward perception reflects your true inner ambitions, you are representing your authentic self and finding a seat at the right table will become a much easier feat. Leave no guesses to your peers and colleagues about how you would like to grow within your career. Ask yourself, "Where do I see myself in five years?" and just as important, "Who can help me get there?" It can be as simple as telling your manager what your goals are and making an effort to continue voicing them. You may assume your goals are obvious, such as obtaining a more senior position or managing a larger team, but diving into specifics is what truly moves the needle and furthers your professional development. Don't shy away from the details. If your day-to-day consists of client relations, but you find fulfillment in process improvement, speak up! Volunteering to put your skills in motion is the first step and connecting with the right person will help make your desire to lead others a reality. As you attract like-minded "brands" complementary to your own, you'll begin building a strong network with the professionals who will directly impact your career and contribute to your growth.

The important thing to remember when managing your personal brand is maintaining a consistent focus. You might have a tendency to convey the message of "I can do it all." However, having a key message that is communicated often to your network will deliver the highest impact. Commit to mastering that focus and prioritize learning as much as you can from those who share the same passion. As you explore resources to expand your knowledge and tune in to the latest and greatest, don't forget to stop and connect along the way. If you participate in an engaging webinar about your focus of interest, take it offline and reach out to the presenter through a personalized message. Ask about how they stay one step ahead of new tools and technologies or which industry organizations they serve as an active member. Putting yourself in front of the right audiences will not only expand your network, but further fuel your personal brand.

Through each meaningful connection, be genuine in your correspondence. Keep your personal brand direct and concise, while learning about the common ground you share with those in your network. For the Women in Electronics community, being part of the same industry is merely scratching the surface. Each member's personal brand is reflective of their expertise and specialties, and the electronics industry has more than I can count. Asking the right questions and having a genuine curiosity can help you strengthen your personal brand and, in turn, lend yourself to contributing towards the professional growth of a colleague who shares the same passion.

As you grow and evolve, your personal brand will, too. Unlike a headshot photoshoot, managing your perception does not have a hard stop, it's a lifelong journey. When you're going through the daily motions, keep your personal brand top-of-mind and place yourself on a path to finding the leaders who share your focus. Together, alongside your network of like-minded brands, there are no limits to what you can accomplish.

Jackie Mattox
President and Founder
Women in Electronics

Jackie Mattox is the founder and president of Women in Electronics (WE), a national non-profit dedicated to developing professional and personal leadership skills for women in the fast-paced electronics industry. She is also the national director of distribution at Bivar, a leading specialty manufacturer of Enclosure Hardware, LED Indicators, and LED Lighting products and solutions.

Prior to founding WE, Mattox began her career in electronics at English Technical Sales, a manufacturer's representative firm in Southern California, where she held several distribution managerial roles. Mattox received her B.A. in Communications from California State University Northridge.

You can reach Jackie Mattox at jackie@womeninelectronics.com.

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As you developed in your career, what were some training tools that you found beneficial to your professional growth?

In addition to what was mentioned previously, I find in-person training at supplier sites to be very beneficial. It is an investment for both companies, but I feel the training and experience are invaluable. Unfortunately, I don't think enough of our suppliers do this on a consistent basis. The more knowledgeable a salesperson is on the product, the more comfortable they are selling it to their customers. Attending the ERA Conference has also proven to be extremely valuable. Not just for the networking opportunities, but the Breakout Sessions and General Sessions always provide great information and new ideas that you can take back to your company.

What are some other industry networking events that you have attended that would be beneficial to other young professionals in the industry?

The local ERA provides great opportunities for networking. I try to attend as many meetings, breakfasts and other events that I can. Any time a supplier has a national sales meeting is also a great way to network with reps from other parts of the country, which is also true for EDS and the ERA Conference. I enjoyed networking with other reps at CPMR as most of them were not from the electronics industry. It is always interesting to talk to reps who sell completely different products and call on an entirely different customer base. Even though there are those differences, you find that we all share a lot of the same experiences and issues.

Do you think that there is enough young talent entering the electronics industry and what could make this field more attractive to future professionals?

I am encouraged to see the influx of young talent into our industry over the last 15 years. I see it at our customers, with the suppliers we represent, as well as our distributor partners. I am a little concerned though about the manufacturers' rep world. I find this interesting as there are many aspects of being a rep that would be attractive to recruiting young people. Working remote from home, flexible hours, getting out of the office, use of new technology and building relationships, all would seem to be what younger professionals are looking for in a job. The fact that you are remote in the territory may be a drawback, as I have read that a lot of the younger generation appreciates the feeling of working on a team more than as an individual. This can be overcome though, but it is important to make sure someone that is remote doesn't feel like they are on an island by themselves. I think we can do a better job cheerleading and advocating being a rep in the electronics industry. I don't see reps in other industries having as much of an issue with getting young talent, but of course this is only anecdotal evidence. It would be interesting to see if there is any data on the mean age of food service, electrical, lighting, etc. Also, as rep companies get older, it may look intimidating or not as appealing to a younger person. It is also important to make sure we compensate young talent when they are found, and not fall into the trap that someone with only one-year experience shouldn't make a certain amount of money.

How do you see your profession and the industry evolve 10 to 20 years from now?

I believe there will always be a need for the manufacturers' rep model. There is a unique role we fill, and there are unique qualities we can bring that a manufacturer can't get from direct or distributor sales alone. With that said, I don't think our line card and customer base will look the same 10-20 years from now. As more business goes offshore and becomes harder to track, I could see a push for higher ASP products that stay in our market becoming a push. I think it will become more and more important for reps to have employees who can speak other languages. I have already thought about the possibility of hiring someone who can speak Spanish and Mandarin to help assist us when communicating with certain customers or suppliers. I see more offshore companies looking to reps to help them break into the market. There are more companies today with no presence in the U.S. that need the local rep to bring them that customer knowledge.

Professionally, what keeps you up at night?

Like most (if not all) of my colleagues, there are many things that can keep me up at night. The human brain has a "funny" way of working. What I mean by that is that our brains love to remind us things we need to do when there is literally nothing we can do about it. To borrow an analogy from one of my favorite books, how many times do we walk by "D" batteries in the store, but our brain only reminds us that the flashlight batteries are dead the moment we open the drawer and go to grab it because the power is out? It sure would have been nice if our brain

reminded us that we needed batteries one of the dozen times we passed them on a shelf in a grocery store. The same is true for me when it comes to work. As I lay down to go to sleep my brain loves to remind me of that phone call I forgot to return, or that email I ran out of time to respond to. Over the past 10 years, I feel like we are all required to wear more and more hats. I am biased on this, but I see this being especially true in the rep world, in which we tend to be smaller companies that don't have the day-to-day need to have dedicated departments like larger companies do. As most rep owners can attest to, we find ourselves heading up the HR duties, website design, hiring and training, payroll, and often even still carrying a bag. Those professional responsibilities are enough to keep anyone up, but add on family and personal responsibilities, and it is easy to see how there is not enough time in the day. My biggest concern that seems to run through my mind at night is the fear that I am doing all of these jobs poorly. There can be a lot of pressure put on a rep, especially a second-generation rep owner. At the end of day, I don't want to let my dad down, and I don't want to let my sales team down. I want to do a good job for my suppliers, and most importantly, for my customers. I hate when something is out of my control, and there is nothing I can do about it. Good or bad, I take a lot of what I do to heart, and it can affect me when a supplier is late on a delivery that may put a customer line down. I find it helpful to remind myself that we have one trip on this earth, and as we near the end of it we aren't going to regret that sales order we missed out on, or the line interview that didn't go well. We are going to regret not spending more time with our family and friends.

Kara Prentoski
OEM Account Manager
Brainard-Nielsen Marketing Inc.

Please provide a little background about yourself.

I was born and raised in Northwest Indiana (DeMotte), which is little over an hour outside of Chicago. I am a first-generation college graduate and studied engineering at Purdue and Valparaiso University. I graduated in 2010 with a B.S. in Civil Engineering. Growing up, my parents would frequently take us to Chicago which is where I began to have a love and appreciation for architecture and why I wanted to study civil engineering. I also have a huge passion for cars (and anything with an engine that moves fast!) and, as a child, was always in the garage with my dad when he was working on our cars, dirt bikes and four-wheelers. All these interests combined is what really drove me to take my first position out of college in sales for a company manufacturing pressure, temperature, flow and level instrumentation (sensors, gauges, etc.). I now reside in the west suburbs of Chicago and, in my free time, enjoy traveling, golf, attending sporting events, shopping, and spending time with family and friends.

How long have you worked in the electronics industry?

I have worked in the electronics industry for 12 years. I began with a sales engineering internship at Dwyer Instruments after my freshman year of college in 2007 and then ultimately went to work for them full time in 2010.

What made you choose this industry as your current career path?

I had two internships during my college career. My first was with Dwyer Instruments and then I had a civil/structural engineering internship for a consulting engineering firm that did work for steel mills and refineries. Having experience in technical sales and then in design engineering were both wonderful, but I ultimately enjoyed being on the sales side of engineering much more. In the world of technical sales, you're dealing with different customers and new applications daily. Working for the structural engineering firm, I was doing close to the same thing daily and ultimately it just didn't provide me much enjoyment. I really love the process of watching a concept become an actual product and assisting engineers during the design process.

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As a young professional what are some of the main challenges you encountered as you embarked on your career journey in the industry?

When I first started my career at Dwyer, I was taking technical support phone calls on the products in order to learn them inside and out. I had a few customers whom I could tell were wary about me supporting them because of my young age and would doubt my knowledge, but I just kept working harder and harder and making myself more and more knowledgeable about the products so that they quickly learned I could help them. Ultimately, I have been blessed and haven't had an immense amount of challenges outside of not having the years and years of experience that most of my colleagues do in the rep industry.

What are some steps that you have taken to overcome these challenges and to ensure that you can establish and nurture a successful career?

I have always enjoyed networking and being around people with more experience than me that I could learn from. I have worked hard to build strong relationships with my colleagues and customers whom I've seen gain success so that I could learn their ways and ultimately try to grow by mirroring their methods.

As you developed in your career, what were some training tools that you found beneficial to your professional growth?

I have taken numerous sales training courses throughout my sales career, but the two that have helped me grow the most in my career as a manufacturers' representative are CSP and CPMR. My employer, Brainard-Nielsen Marketing (BNM) has encouraged, sponsored, and supported my attendance at both. I have one more year of classes left until I am a CPMR graduate!

What are some industry networking events that you have attended that would be beneficial to other young professionals in the industry?

BNM is an avid supporter of ERA so I attend the ERA Conference annually and do my best to make it to my local ERA chapter's events. I enjoy attending the ERA Conference because it provides the opportunity to learn from various experts and share best practices in sales and marketing. In addition to that, it's been a great forum to network with my peers from across the nation and meet other young professionals in my field.

Do you think that there is enough young talent entering the electronics industry and what could make this field more attractive to future professionals?

When I worked directly for manufacturers, prior to joining a manufacturers' rep firm, I did see more young professionals working alongside me. I don't think it's about the field being attractive or not, but I don't believe many young sales professionals know that going to market with a manufacturers' rep firm exists if they've never been around this type of sales process. I think schools and associations could do a better job of marketing this to young professionals.

How do you see your profession and the industry evolve 10 to 20 years from now?

The demand for smart sensors and electronic devices will continue to rise as IoT becomes more widespread. This will continue to open doors of new opportunity to electro-mechanical-based rep firms. From a sales standpoint, many manufacturers are considering implementing (or have already implemented) a B2B2C (business-to-business-to-consumer) model. The growth of e-commerce has made this a topic and something that many manufacturers are seeing a need to participate in by having online stores.

Professionally, what keeps you up at night?

The above, B2B2C, topic is what currently keeps me up at night! In B2B sales, you never want to be driven out of your role by the internet/B2C sales. I'm trusting that those manufacturers who implement this will be mindful and work out a process that supports both B2B and B2C sales platforms! ■

COMPONENTS

Bob Evans, CPMR
EK Micro
Rolling Meadows, Ill.

Rebound or new norm?

In my last column I observed that there was both optimism and pessimism in the marketplace when I spoke to my counterparts around the country. Looking in the press, there also seems to be a divide. In its May 2019 Survey Summary, TPC reported,"Our May 2019 Semi industry survey of over 20K electronics industry professionals showed mixed results."

Frankly, there was more bad news than good throughout the electronic component world as tariffs started to put the hurt on a variety of companies and industries. There has been direct and indirect fallout from the tariffs. Customers are facing dramatic cost increases; suppliers are struggling with how they handle the complaints from customers, and everyone is suffering from fear of the unknown, wondering when this will end, or if in fact it will blow over. Is a "new norm" settling in?

Companies are starting to get used to this condition of doing business. Most companies have developed a way of dealing with it as tariffs become a way of life. And even though manufacturing in the U.S. is reportedly down, are we rebounding off the bottom at this point?

Let's take a look at a couple of observations by folks we generally regard to be in the know.

In August, the IPC reported, "Year-on-year declines in orders in seven of the last 12 months are taking a toll on sales growth in the North American PCB industry," said Sharon Starr, IPC's director of market research. "Sales growth has slowed in recent months and dipped into negative territory in July. The slowdown is reflected in the book-to-bill ratio, which has hovered around 1.00 in the last five months. This indicates the probability of flattening sales growth in the second half of the year." A Book to Bill of 1.0; flattening sales, sounds like the bottom of the trough.

In September, the Semiconductor Industry Association reported, "Worldwide sales of semiconductors were $33.4 billion in July 2019, 1.7 percent more than the June 2019 total of $32.8 billion ..." This might support the bounce off the bottom. The new norm is represented in the part of SIA's statement though, "but 15.5 percent less than the July 2018 total of $39.5 billion."

From my perspective, we have found that 2019 is going to end up looking a lot like 2018 did in our little micro-economy. Our revenue this year projects to be within a few percentage points of last year's. This has been echoed to me by many of my rep brethren as the year rolls into the 4th quarter. So, are we at a new norm, or are we about to rebound? Stay tuned.

MATERIALS, ASSEMBLY, PRODUCTION & SUPPLY

Troy Gunnin
Sun Rep Inc.
Tampa, Fla.

Adapting to change

In the Summer issue of *The Representor* I talked about "change." I just read an editorial by Casey Laughman in the September issue of Food Processing that prompted me to take another look at the changes taking place around us in our personal and business lives.

When I got to the office this morning, there was an Amazon delivery at the front door. I believe we ordered it yesterday. We have come to expect that — no longer mail the order (if you are old enough to remember the Sears Roebuck catalog) and wait a week or more for delivery. Just this morning on the news, I saw that UPS has been granted permission to use drones for delivery of medical and other products weighing over 100 pounds to hospitals and remote locations in North Carolina. The impact of the internet and the ability to shop multiple locations and, thanks to Google, just punch in and search for what you are looking for, place the order and likely have it tomorrow, has decimated many brick and mortar businesses. It seems that every week we hear of well-known retailers going out of business and shopping centers struggling to stay relevant.

We see major retailers, including grocery chains, that are working feverishly to be relevant in the "online" trend. For those smaller and less able to compete in this market, the future seems uncertain. Add to that the changing tastes of consumers. Think automobile. The "big three" have virtually eliminated the sedan in favor of the SUV and truck. We now "stream" to our phones, computers or tablets rather that sit in front of the TV. We eat out rather than have the traditional "family time" at dinner.

The military/aerospace/industrial market is not exempt from change. A couple of recent announcements that made the news include L3 and Harris forming L3/Harris and United Technologies buying Raytheon. Does this make them stronger or reduce competition?

As reps, we are seeing an impact on our day-to-day operations. In talking with many of my rep friends we have shared a common concern - the difficulty of scheduling appointments. It appears that the time constraints on the buyers and engineers today dictate that unless they have a specific need that you can possibly solve, they will just "look up the specs online." That makes it even more important to stay in contact with our key contacts by email and phone. We can keep them current with information on new products or applications. We want them to be sure that when they do have that need, we can get the appointment.

These are certainly trying times and the challenges are not likely to disappear overnight. How companies respond to these challenges will dictate their future. That includes us as reps. We can't wave a magic wand and make it happen, but we can and will find a way to continued success.

EXECUTIVE COMMENTARY: The opportunity

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away to find a new manufacturer, rep or distributor. We should always keep in mind the impact on anything we are proposing to do on the customer.

So … where is the opportunity that comes out of all of this change and chaos?

It rests in your hands! It is up to YOU to lead your organization though this matrix of challenges. YOU need to continue to "skate where the puck is going" and stay ahead of change … continue to reinvent yourself and your company so YOU will be the winner in any of the M&A activity.

Do you have a strong hiring practice that allows you to continue to "restock the pond," bringing tomorrow's sales leaders into your organization? Do you have a formal succession plan in place?

A major way to remain relevant is by differentiating your rep company, distributor or manufacturer so the customer simply cannot afford to remove you from their supply chain. Reps can do this by providing a total solution to their customers' needs through their manufacturers; provide design services via associated selling linking different technologies into a total solutions selling approach versus advocating one manufacturer at a time. Customers want to get total design help versus one socket at a time ... be that rep who delivers this.

Distribution can differentiate themselves by developing unique product offerings; interconnect value added manufacturing, cable assembly, crystal programming, etc. They can also develop a strong design-in model either internally using their own FAE teams ... OR ... by partnering with the rep community and delivering total solutions selling to their mutual customers. Once the solution is designed in, the distributor can set up a strong supply chain model ensuring risk-mitigation and continuity of supply along with a best-in-class OTD and quality measurements. What good is the best engineering solution if the customer cannot get the product on time? After all, nothing happens until the product is shipped to the customer!

Bottom line: Do not sit back and wait for all this to blow over. It never has and never will. Learn to differentiate your company from your competition. Make it almost impossible for someone to eliminate you from their sales model.

Finally, keep the customer in your camp. At some point, a new organization will ask its customers who should be the new rep or distributor. You want them to pick YOU! This will only happen with lots of hard work and tough skating to where that puck is going ... be there before your competition!

Skate away ... ■

FROM THE TOP: Perhaps the rep

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industry? I think the latter.

Trusted colleague, fellow rep, chair of the 2020 ERA Conference, and friend Mike Swenson, was recently quoted:

"This year's conference theme, 'Takin' it to the Streets: Succeeding in a Dynamic Market,' is a metaphor for the core value of ERA and the field-level (street) activities that manufacturers' representatives are engaged in with customers, distributors and manufacturers to win business, deliver value and produce results."

Whether you are in attendance as part of what will be a sold out conference or not (and I hope you are); my challenge to every member of the rep community and our Association is the same – take it to the streets; defend our historical value; and demonstrate our ongoing relevance through our performance.

As we do that collectively, my hope is present and future observers will note, "The differentiating factor in the level of sales success for any company is their manufacturers' rep network ... and perhaps their social media proficiency, innovative marketing campaigns and use of big data analytics."

As always, I can be reached at **ctanzola@fusionsourcing.com** and welcome your comments and feedback. I look forward to seeing you in Austin, if not sooner. ■

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Chapter News reports the local activities of the 22 chapters of ERA. The chapters sponsor educational and training workshops, local trade shows, legislative and industry projects to enhance the professionalism of individual members and to advance the goals and mission of the national association.

ARIZONA

Arizona ERA is sponsoring Tech Storm, a local incubator initiative in collaboration with local design engineering contacts and Arizona State University (ASU), to be held this fall at ICA, a contract manufacturer in Phoenix. The goal of the event is to bring local community engineering resources and ASU entrepreneur individuals together to explore the future of IoT and connectivity development.

Arizona ERA conducted a successful in-plant show at Medtronic in Phoenix with over 100 engineers in attendance. The chapter is planning for additional in-plant shows at General Dynamics and Benchmark/Lark Electronics.

The chapter also is planning a networking luncheon in Phoenix, with a presentation by Lark Engineering, an RF microwave specialty design company, owned and supported by Benchmark Electronics.

Due to the overwhelming positive feedback of the last Sonoran Silicon Valley Tech Show, the Arizona ERA has decided to host another show in the Spring of 2020; details, date and location to be announced.

CAROLINAS

Carolinas ERA is continuing to host its bimonthly networking breakfasts. The chapter also hosted a "Harmony in Partnerships" program in September which explored new paths to improve relationships between distributors and reps. The chapter's 16th Annual Memorial Golf Tournament Benefiting Carolinas Electronics Representatives (CERA) Scholarship Fund was held in October.

CHICAGOLAND - WISCONSIN

In September, Chicagoland-Wisconsin ERA held a networking event, "A Day at the Races," at the Arlington Racetrack in Arlington Heights, Ill. The event attracted nearly 50 attendees.

EMPIRE STATE

The chapter hosted its 13th annual Charity Golf Event in August at Ravenwood Golf Club in Victor, N.Y. The tournament was attended by reps, distributors, customers and community members - all donating time and money to Cancer Research. Rob O'Rourke of NYCOM, Inc. chaired the tournament committee for the second year which increased the donation amount to the American Cancer Society through Hope Lodge in Rochester, N.Y.

FLORIDA-SUNSHINE

Florida-Sunshine ERA organized its first annual golf tournament and charity event at the Tuscawilla Country Club in Winter Springs. The event also celebrated the chapter's 65 years of service to the electronics industry. The purpose of the charity fundraiser was to establish a foundation that will benefit those in need in the electronics industry. This year's benefactor was Just Our Soldiers Helpers.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

October 2019 Northern California ERA Women in Leadership chapter event.

Northern California ERA held several networking events in 2019, including educational events that discussed new tax laws and how to maximize LinkedIn features. The chapter also hosted a bocce ball event in Los Gatos, as well as a Women in Leadership event in October. The chapter will round out the year with a tour of the Tech Museum in San Jose and a Christmas party.

The chapter announced its new board beginning Jan 1, 2020. Kenny Kumar of Semisource will serve as President, JoAnn Morgese of Meridian Technical Sales Inc. will serve as Vice President, Larry Flores of Ross Marketing will serve as Treasurer, and Terri Straube of Straube Associates Inc. will serve as Secretary.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Southern California ERA hosted several events including a panel discussion on how best to utilize LinkedIn for reps in July; the 16th Annual Summer Social & Tabletop Show in August, which featured industry distributor member Steve Farley's Band "Burnt Toast!"; an owner's forum, "Branding & Website Strategy for Your Organization," presented by Mark Raymond and Clifford Price.

The chapter is hosting a four-man scramble charity golf tournament at Aliso Viejo Country Club on Nov. 18 benefiting Operation Homefront. The event will feature silent and live auctions, as well as dinner.

(continued from page 22)

bank that is full of wonderful experiences. For the most part, participation in all of them gave me fuel to continue to adapt and succeed in the rep business.

The ERA staff at that time, as I'm sure they are now, was an all-pro team. To work with Ray Hall, Jerry Francis, Tess Hill, Karin Derkacz and Janet Hipp was a great pleasure and a great benefit to me and our association. There was a wonderful memorial service for Ray this past May and I was very fortunate to be able to attend.

My oldest son was killed in 1999 at the age of 25 and that took a lot of wind out of my sails. The business became more difficult for me. I figured the new company that my partner formed was on its way to great things so it would be a good time for me to change my life.

In 1987, I had purchased a home on a lake in Watersmeet, Mich., which is in the western most county of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in the heart of the Ottawa National Forest, which covers about a million acres. Weekend getaways and vacation times were spent there for 15 years. It is truly a piece of God's Country, but don't tell anybody.

I wasn't ready to retire, but I wanted to move up north. So, a second career was in order. I decided to sell fun for a living and purchased a Polaris dealership. At the time they made snowmobiles, ATVs and jet skis. Little did I know that they would be the first company to develop a two passenger ATV, now called Side by Side. The Polaris RZR started a revolution in the off-road vehicle industry. It has been a blast. The great thing is we have over 500 miles of trails in our local system which provides ever-changing riding opportunities depending on the season.

Just like the rep business, I've had to adapt to industry changes, demands and a changing market.

This Spring, I sold my business to one of my competitors and am finally RETIRED! It only took me 56 years, but I am happy to report: THERE IS LIFE AFTER THE REP BUSINESS!!! If you would like to reach out, please email me at rfd403@aol.com.

On a sidenote, I've enclosed a picture of Maria, my beloved purebred mutt of a companion. I recently had to end her fight against Blastomycosis. It is a terrible fungus that gets in their lungs and is highly fatal. Maria also had it in her nervous system and the vets at the University of Wisconsin Veterinary School clinic worked around the clock to try to save her. What a wonderful, caring staff they have there, but once the disease progressed into her brain, there was no stopping it.

I urge any of you reading this who have pets who spend time in the woods where there might be decaying vegetation to take quick action if they ever develop a deep cough.

Maria will not be missed by our local wildlife, but she is definitely chasing chipmunks, squirrels, deer, raccoons and an occasional bear in heaven. ■

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ERA ANNOUNCES 2020 CONFERENCE KEYNOTE SPEAKER

ERA announced that Connie Podesta, Hall of Fame speaker, award-winning author, former radio/TV personality, therapist, expert on the psychology of sales, leadership, change, accountability and engagement, and comedienne, will be the keynote speaker at the upcoming conference, scheduled Feb. 23-25, 2020, at the AT&T Center in Austin, Texas.

Connie will open ERA's 2020 Conference program on Monday morning, Feb. 24, with a presentation titled, "Stand Out from the Crowd … Out-Think, Out-Lead and Out-Sell the Competition."

Connie is a game-changing, revenue-building, sales-generating ball of fire whose rare blend of laugh-out-loud comedy, killer take-away strategies and interactive, no-power-point delivery style have made her one of the most unique and memorable speakers on stage today. As a human relations expert, Connie, who is both refreshingly candid and wonderfully entertaining, will bring out your edgy, creative, competitive side as she takes you inside the minds of today's savvy, but super-demanding global market and delivers some powerhouse strategies that will help you increase sales, profits, good will and your customer base. Competition – watch out! Business as usual? No way! Status quo? Move over? Change? Keep it coming!

ERA 2020 Conference Committee Chair Mike Swenson, CMPR, President, Mel Foster Company, said, "The Keynote Sub-Committee did an outstanding job selecting a keynote speaker who will offer not only an unforgettable conference opening but also invaluable take-away strategies. I am confident that Connie will deliver a powerful high-energy presentation and make sure that we all walk away with a fresh perspective on how to be more accountable, exceed expectations and discover unique ways to sell more at the 'street level.'"

ERA CONFERENCE COMMITTEE ANNOUNCES MONDAY GENERAL SESSION TOPICS AND SPEAKERS

ERA Conference Committee announced the two Monday, Feb. 24, General Sessions topics and speakers at the upcoming 2020 Conference.

Dr. Robert Genetski, one of the nation's leading classical economists, will present the Monday morning General Session, "How Tariffs, China & the 2020 Election Will Impact the Economy."

The Monday afternoon General Session, "The Disruption of IoT: How the Forces of AI and Blockchain are Changing IoT and the New Opportunities that are Being Created," will be presented by high-tech industry leader and IoT Consultant Ali Sebt.

For more information about the ERA Conference, visit **https://era.org/era-events/era-conference/**.

SALES DECLINE IN SEPTEMBER FOR MOST RETAILERS AFTER STRONG SUMMER

U.S. retail sales declined 0.3 percent in September, the first decrease in seven months, leading to concerns that weakness in manufacturing is spreading to other parts of the economy. Households reduced spending on building materials, hobbies, online purchases and vehicles, the Commerce Department reported.

According to MarketWatch, the big question is how much consumer spending wanes, especially with businesses largely sitting on the sidelines. The trade war between the U.S. and China has disrupted global supply chains, upset business-investment plans and caused executives to hunker down until the dispute is resolved.

So long as consumers do their part, the U.S. is likely to avoid recession. The Federal Reserve's decision to cut interest rates also appears to have given parts of the economy like the housing industry a boost.

ELECTRONICS MANUFACTURERS FEEL THE EFFECTS OF U.S.-CHINA TRADE WAR

Almost 90 percent of U.S. electronics manufacturers state that they are troubled by the increased tariffs imposed by the U.S. and China on each other's imports – some are even investing less in the U.S., **evertiq.com** reported.

The data comes from a survey conducted by the industry association IPC, which queried its U.S. members on the effects of the tariffs.

On average, the companies report they have seen tariff increases on 31 percent of the total dollar value of the products they import. Twenty five percent of companies report over half of the dollar value of the products they import are facing higher tariffs.

Some 69 percent of companies report that they are seeing lower profit margins as a result of increased tariffs, which carries with itself a ripple effect of negative consequences: 21 percent report they are reducing investments in the U.S., and 13 percent say they are even cutting back on hiring and/or reducing headcount.

More than a third of companies say that they cannot increase their prices to cover the cost of higher import tariffs, due to various factors.

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- Locator Online Directory of Manufacturers' Reps
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- FAQs Manufacturers Ask About Representatives
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- ERA Logos

ERA Meetings & Programs

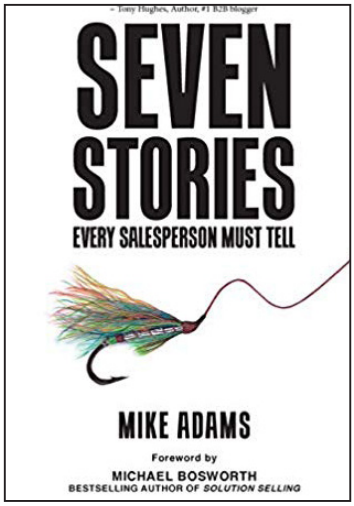
- 2020 ERA Conference - Feb. 23-25, 2020
- Board of Directors Meeting - Feb. 26, 2020

A book review and recommendation by Dan Beaulieu

Seven Stories Every Salesperson Must Tell

by Mike Adams
Copyright: 2018
Price Paperback: $14.95 / Kindle: $2.99

A great book to get you started on storytelling



There are a lot of good books out there about storytelling. They talk about the importance of telling stories. They always indicate how people are more interested in listening to stories than they are listening to presentations. And, of course, we all know that when people hear a good story, they are entertained enough that they remember it and, yes, might even repeat it to others.

However, very few of these books, take the time to go into the actual dynamics of storytelling, such as what kind of story to tell; how to develop the story; or the right story for the right occasion. Frankly, of all of the books I have read, none have done that. Until this one.

In "Seven Stories Every Salesperson Must Tell," Mike Adams breaks this all down for the reader. He describes exactly what the title indicates, the seven stories that every professional needs to tell. From what he calls the "Hook" stories, the ones that are personally about you or a person you know, to the "Land" stories, to close the deal, which are stories that show the value of your services or products, Mike makes a good, clear and comprehensive study of each type of story, including breaking them down and showing true life examples of each.

He also spends a lot of time focusing on the all-important success stories, which he includes in the section he calls "Fight-stories to differentiate." He even includes a reference table for the seven stories, which is actually a breakdown on how to not only use each kind of story, but when to use it, who to tell it to and when.

In a chart, at the end of the book, Mike also includes a story catalog describing all of the stories he used in the book and on what page they appeared so that the reader can easily find them for future reference.

Engineers and technical people will find this book very useful, especially because Mike himself is an engineer turned salesperson who writes the way a left-brained person would find easy to follow and understand. This is especially important for those of us in technical fields where we are dealing with a lot of left-brained people.

"Seven Stories Every Salesperson Must Tell," is a great book for technical people to learn the art of storytelling, but also good for anyone who wants to tell a better story.

Dan Beaulieu is the president and founder of D.B. Management LLC, a consulting firm specializing in all aspects of sales, marketing and branding with a focus on rep-principal relationships. His latest book is **The PCB 101 Handbook** *which can be purchased online by emailing* ***danbbeaulieu@aol.com.*** *Dan is also the author of* "It's Only Common Sense," *a weekly sales column appearing at* ***pcb007.com.*** *Dan can be reached at 207.649.0879.*

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Headquartered in New Hyde Park, NY, both companies distribute their ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 products from their wholly American owned factory located in Suzhou China, and from their New York warehouse.

For consideration, please email your resume to Mr. Buddy Shah at: ***buddys@hascorelays.com***.

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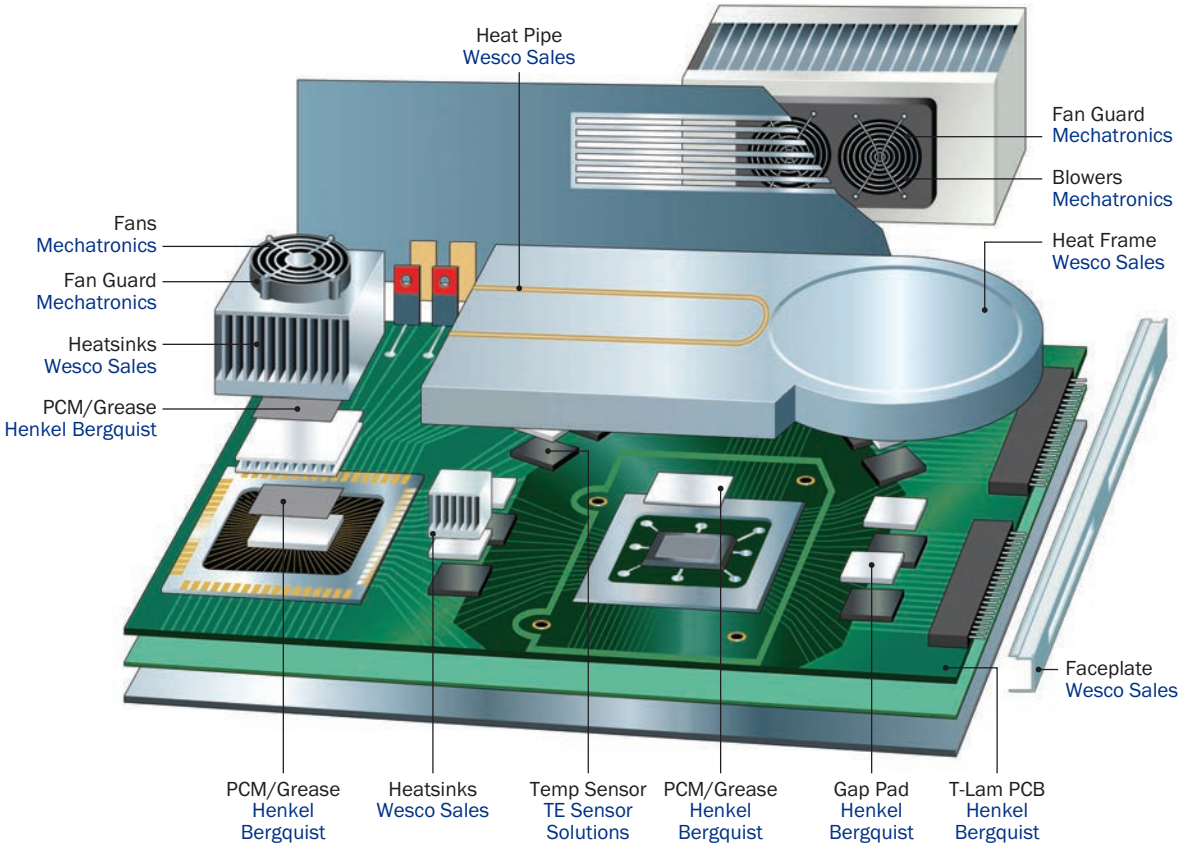

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