

frank talk

Business relationships play a vital role in helping us achieve personal and professional fulfillment. With so much more time today spent working, attending meetings and industry events, or flying around the world to visit factories, **the time we invest in work and business relationships can help us reach professional and personal success.**

For many, our job helps define our identities, friendships and the relationships that help us through each day. In addition to the relationship you, as a retailer, have with your banker, lawyer or accountant, the relationship with your rep can be very important in helping you achieve success.

Most principals in rep organizations have a broad range of experience that can serve you in building your business. Many have been buyers themselves; most have degrees in business. Before a rep can sell you anything, he or she must sell themselves to a sales manager or marketing VP and, having done so, must gain a first-class education in the products they bring through your doors.

Independent reps live and die by the products they sell, the service they provide and the effectiveness with which they match retail stores and products. If a rep repeatedly fails in one of these areas, manufacturers will take their business elsewhere.

An effective marriage between a rep organization and a retailer can help your store define its personality

Good reps can help bring focus to key lines by getting marketing support and merchandising aids that can help you drive your business.

by Frank Brady



A Beneficial Partner

a good rep relationship supports your store

by featuring unique brands and telling unique merchandising stories. It is not unusual to find gourmet reps specializing in kitchenware, lifestyle reps offering home decor and tabletop reps all calling on the same store on the same day. This mixture brought to your store can save you time and money, allowing to see more in a day than you could visiting showrooms.

Here are 10 things that every retailer should know to get the most out of their relationships with manufacturers representatives:

10) GREAT SERVICE: You are entitled to great service and to letting your rep know how well they are providing it. If they're doing a good job, tell them. If not, tell them that too. Reps should do their best to make things right for you and in turn you should calmly share problems and concerns along with your expectations for making the situation right.

9) BUSINESS PARTNER: Good reps want to be a real business partner, not "just another rep" calling on you. **Use your reps' experience, industry and product knowledge, and supplier and retail relationships.** There is a wealth of information available to you.

8) BUSINESS GROWTH: Good reps can help bring focus to key lines by getting marketing support and merchandising aids that can help you drive your business. Don't be afraid to ask what support might be available.

7) PROVIDE BRANDED PRODUCT: 70% to 80% of your business has to be in quality branded products. Your customers' impression of your store is based on the quality of the brands you carry. Don't waste time carrying any product less than the best.

6) TRAINING/ DEMONSTRATION: Use your reps to train your

staff. Reps know the features and benefits of the products they sell and can bring insights about manufacturing because they've been to the factory. Experienced, committed reps can share selling tips and strategies that can give your sales staff the confidence to close the sale.

5) FAST & ACCURATE COMMUNICATION: To work together most effectively with your rep, you need fast access to each other. **Timely information is what successful business is all about.** No one likes to be the last to know about a great promotion or new innovative product in the market.

4) KEEP AN OPEN MIND: Be open to new products and innovations. An ongoing commitment to new ideas keeps your store fresh and cutting-edge. It is your key competitive

point of differentiation.

3) MARKET YOURSELF: When you attend tradeshows, come prepared to sell yourself, your store, your plans and your dreams to vendor management. **By standing out in the crowd, you make it easier for your reps to get tools from the supplier to help drive your business.**

Words are okay but ad copy and visual aids are more memorable. We need to bring key vendors into our partnership for success and this extra effort gets big time results for all of us.

2) MOVE PAST MISTAKES: If your rep ever lets you down, they should do their best to correct any mistake made by them or the manufacturers they represent. The goal for both sides is to maintain a successful, ongoing relationship. Mistakes happen and the focus should be on moving the business forward for everyone.

1) EXIT STRATEGY: An exit strategy will allow you to get maximum value for your business and will allow your business to carry on. Your employees win by having a future; your suppliers win by having a continuing market; and your reps win by maintaining an ongoing customer.

The relationship between a manufacturer's sales rep and retailer requires commitment and hard work, but is definitely worth the effort.

Frank Brady has more than 30 years of experience in the gourmet housewares business as founder and president of Brady Marketing, a San Francisco-based sales and marketing company.