

Chapter 5

Selecting the Right Agent

Following-up the Interview

If you have followed through with your plan to be objective in the interviews with all the manufacturers' agents, you now have notes on each agent's responses to the same questions and you can compare the responses one question at a time. Devise a simple rating system, perhaps a 1 to 5 numbering scale, denoting quality of response.

The next step is based on a more subjective evaluation of the agents. In your interview record, you will have made certain notations for your own reference, such as: This woman exhibited more enthusiasm than the other candidates; or this man talked about promotional ideas that demonstrated a high degree of creativity in finding ways to sell my product — he appeared to be more interested than average.

What about that sixth sense that manufacturers and agents call chemistry? Maybe the assertive stance an agent took during the interview left you with the feeling that the agent would overwhelm buyers, or worse, oversell your products to customers. It is very important that you feel compatible with the first agent you appoint in the United States.

If you have not previously checked the bank references as well as customers' and principals' references for a particular agent who scored high in your interview, now is the time to do a thorough check on all three counts. You might decide to go back to the agent if you require an explanation for a discrepancy in any of the references' comments. Let us hope the agent will do the same for you — if one of your references issues a word of caution to the agent about your company's past record of supplying the firm.

A Visit to Your Plant

As soon as you have selected the agent with whom you want to negotiate a contract, invite the agent to visit your Canadian head office and plant. Arrange for the other executives on your staff to meet with the agent and explain how each division operates. Make provisions for a mutually agreeable sharing of expenses for the visit to your plant.

Show the agent your company's quality control procedures, warehousing facilities and shipping system. If you are employing a direct sales staff in Canada, introduce the new agent to some members of the sales team.

Some future problems in the new U.S. territory can be handled by long-distance. From now on, your U.S. agent will be communicating with someone whom the agent has met at your plant.