

Chapter 7

Communication: A Continuing Process

GETTING STARTED

Trust

The contract with your agent is signed. Both you and the agent have discussed the goals each of you has for developing your own businesses. It has been agreed that you are marketing with the long term in mind. How can you and your agent establish mutual trust and a good working relationship as soon as possible?

If each party begins the working relationship with the assumption of trust, it is probable that both agent and manufacturer will work to maintain this atmosphere of good faith. As the manufacturer, you can work out a program for effective communication with the agent.

Communication

In this publication, we have stressed a positive approach to the manufacturer-agent relationship. It is also important to remember that agents who have returned home should not be forgotten about for weeks at a time.

The agent has independent contractor status and is really your business partner in terms of functioning for you in the field. Teamwork takes practice. What if you have to make a business trip and the agent has to solve an urgent problem with the assistance of someone else in your plant in Canada? Things will go much smoother if your agent has met all your company managers and key personnel. Your own people should have been well briefed on the details of your company's contract with the agent.

Public Relations

Your current and potential customers should be made aware of this new relationship between you and your agent. And what about spreading the news within your industry sector? Together, you and your agent should draw up a plan that might look something like this:

1. The Canadian supplier should write a letter to any of the supplier's present accounts in the agent's territory. (This may not apply if you have never exported to the U.S. before hiring the agent.) Emphasize that quality of service should improve under the new relationship.
2. Your company's public relations section or a professional advertising agency can draft a press release to be sent to media, such as newspapers in the territory (business editors) and entrepreneurial journals, or to professional associations, if applicable (engineers, for example).
3. Send feature articles to regional and national trade journals within your industry sector, e.g. toy and hobby magazines, apparel and clothing journals or weeklies, and automotive parts association newsletters.
4. A letter should be sent to the agent's present customers announcing your line, perhaps with a catalogue.
5. With your help, the agent should mail a promotional piece on your product line to other potential customers in the territory.
6. Personal visits by yourself, with your agent, to a few key customers the agent feels are likely to be volume purchasers of your line can prove worthwhile. Canada still seems far away to many American businesspeople. You can obtain feedback on the products you are offering in the U.S., and on the requirements of some of your customers.