

Pacesetter Sales & Associates Ltd. Best Practices

Finding a niche and doing your best as an Independent Sales Business

History – Fulfilling a Need

Little more than a decade ago, Craig Lindsay recognized a niche waiting to be filled in Canada.

In 1992, he was the marketing manager for a company called Safety Supply Canada, a distributor of safety supply products. When the company found itself in financial difficulties, Lindsay says, “I was given an opportunity to seek alternative employment. I contemplated that, at 36 years of age, I had a wife and young family to consider. What would I want to do? I knew of the independent representative business, which was pretty prevalent in the U.S. in the safety products area, but not that prevalent in Canada. I thought Canada would be an ideal market for this approach because of its vast geography. I used to see these manufacturers with one person covering all of Canada, and I knew they couldn’t physically do it because the costs are prohibitive. You spend most of your time on a plane, and you can’t possibly cover a country of this size. So how do you do the job more efficiently?”

Pondering that question led Lindsay to contact his mentor, George Hayward, president of United Sales Associates in Cincinnati, Ohio and currently Manufacturers Agents National Association’s (MANA’s) manager of international development. “George said, ‘why don’t you come down and see me?’ I took my family down with me on a long weekend in May 1992. We worked over the entire weekend. He showed me how to set up and run a good independent rep business. He mentored me and showed me the ropes, gave me a book on running a successful manufacturers’ rep business, and convinced me that this was a good career. I had had a good job, a regular paycheque. Here I was taking a leap of faith, with no steady paycheque, but George convinced me this was an excellent opportunity for me.”

By August 1992, Lindsay had set up his own business as a sole proprietorship (it’s now incorporated as a limited company), starting with three product lines, focusing on personal protection and commercial safety-related products. His initial strategy to attract clients was seemingly simple: he approached manufacturers who sold their products in Canada but had no sales representation here. Lindsay focused on companies in the United States with whom he was already working as a distributor in his previous position as a company employee. Part of his responsibilities had been interviewing these manufacturers, and Lindsay realized they had no one “on the ground” in Canada.

Lindsay initially made a list of 30 potential manufacturers in the United States and Europe who might need sales support and ultimately approached the CEOs or vice-presidents of sales and marketing of seven of those in the US. Of the original seven, Lindsay secured contacts with three.

Lindsay was fortunate enough to know most of these companies from his previous job as a distributor, so he was familiar with their operations and did not have to carry out further research on their businesses. He asked them if they were interested in expanding into the lucrative Canadian market with the help of someone who knew the market, and he made a promise to them: "With the money I make, I'll invest it back into the business to hire more people."

Lindsay was good to his word. Within a year, he had hired his first representative and six months later a second representative. The first was located in Edmonton and covered Western Canada, and the second was in Atlantic Canada covering that region. The Western sales rep had heard through his contacts that Lindsay was looking for a Western presence. In fact, in just about every case, Lindsay has found his reps through networking and word-of-mouth versus newspaper advertising. Today, the Ontario-based Pacesetter Sales & Associates Ltd. numbers 12 sales representatives and two administrative staff.

Pacesetter Sales provides a number of services and support to sales representatives from head office:

- Introductions to the manufacturers and setting up product training sessions with them.
- administrative support to allow sales reps to concentrate on selling, including sales reports to the manufacturers, sales and analysis reports, the collection of commissions and payment of bills, and development of marketing tools like the company website and online newsletters.
- software for managing sales territories, including a contact management system, sales analysis reporting system, Microsoft Office, and centralized email address for standardized contact with salespeople.
- sales training, typically related to sales selling skills.

Organization of the sales team is by territory, as follows: one representative in Atlantic Canada, one in Quebec, one in Eastern Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area, one in Southwestern and Northern Ontario, three in the Prairies representing Alberta, Northern Alberta and Northern Saskatchewan, and two in British Columbia, representing the Greater Vancouver Area and the rest of the province. Three people, including Lindsay and two administrative staff, work out of head office in Sharon, Ontario. The Quebec representative and Atlantic representative work strictly from a business centre, but do not make out-of-office road trips, relying instead on regular telephone and electronic communications with their customer base.

Within some corporate accounts, the responsibilities are shared between Lindsay and the designated agent representative. Division of labour is based on the location of the head office. Where head office is located in a designated territory, Lindsay works with his territory agent representative.

Company Mission

PACESETTER Sales & Associates are Canadian independent manufacturers' representatives.

The company offers quality "value-added" service for a select group of principals in the safety and industrial sectors. Pacesetter's objective is to provide successful sales/marketing initiatives that reach the desired goals of all parties (principal, distributor and end user).

The company's stated strategy is to:

- Utilize "selected" distribution to cover the market.
- Direct end-user penetration in conjunction with distributor sales personnel.
- Develop both distributor field sales and inside sales personnel through constant training and selling initiatives.
- Develop Canadian business plans that harmonize with both principals and distributor plans.
- Provide principals with market feedback, competitive activities, and marketing ideas.
- Target and attain sales goals.

Building the Business One Sale at a Time

Today two of the original three manufacturers' product lines still have Pacesetter Sales representing their business in Canada:

Ergodyne – Ergodyne (www.ergodyne.com) was founded in 1983 with the mandate to make the workplace safer. Their primary business when Craig Lindsay was introduced to the company in 1992 was ergonomic/personal protective products focused on making the workplace fit the worker, not the worker fit the workplace.

The company pioneered the ergonomics category before the term was well-known. In the early 1980s, the company recognized the increased incidence of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs) and the high costs and suffering associated with these injuries.

Today, Ergodyne is a multi-market ergonomics company with a line of products and programs - many of them proprietary - for workers in a wide range of work environments. Corporate headquarters, distribution and assembly operations are located in St. Paul, Minnesota. The company also has an office and distribution facility located South America. Ergodyne has more than 400 authorized distributors worldwide carrying the Ergodyne brand of personal protective equipment, workstation products, mechanical devices, and training and consulting products.

Ergodyne was the first company Craig Lindsay approached when he launched Pacesetter Sales in 1992. President Tom Votel asked Lindsay at the time, "Why should I use you, you're just one person?" Lindsay replied, "That's one more guy than you have in Canada." In addition to working with an independent sales agency in Canada, Ergodyne has relationships with another five independent sales agencies throughout the U.S. and Europe.

As Lindsay's business has grown, so has Ergodyne's in Canada. While the company won't discuss numbers, Vice-President of Sales Mark Lindstrom says the company could not have penetrated the Canadian market without Pacesetter's guidance. "Craig is nimble enough to know the marketplace. He shows very sound, very strong and focused leadership, with excellent follow-up."

Ergodyne brings together all its rep agencies for bi-annual leadership meetings and also communicates with the sales agents through quarterly business reviews, where the company looks at sales projections and targets and discusses strategy for the next quarter. Says Lindstrom, "Having someone in Canada who knows our business inside and out has really allowed us to focus our product lines for the target audience and opened doors to distribution that we would not otherwise have enjoyed."

Mike Baldwin, VP sales and Marketing, 1-800-798-9250

Justrite Manufacturing – Justrite (www.justritemfg.com) is a leading source of storage, handling and security products, including fire prevention safety equipment for hazardous materials, environmental protection spill containment devices, and specialized storage products. Since 1906, Justrite has provided solutions to help protect workers, reduce fire risks, and improve productivity. Justrite safety cabinets, safety cans, specialty containers and storage products and drum handling equipment are available through authorized distributors worldwide.

Pacesetter now represents 12 safety and protection-related product lines, from Gojo, a hygienic hand cleaner and skin care products company, and Streamlight, industrial and emergency service flashlights, to the popular isotonic beverage, Gatorade. Lindsay is always looking at new opportunities. "In any given year," says Lindsay, "we turn down more product lines than we ever take on as new

clients. If we didn't have product lines, we'd be hunting all the time. You do have to hunt, but our business has reached the level where don't advertise for new lines. We get new business now through word of mouth referrals from existing clients and customers."

How many lines are too many? Lindsay cautions other perspective sales agents against being overly ambitious with their projections. "The temptation is there to represent multiple manufacturers and product lines, but that would hurt our customers because we would not have enough time to properly service and penetrate their business. We have to take a sales plan from a manufacturer and execute, and we'd be seriously challenged to execute with so many product lines. There is no magic number or formula for calculating how many product lines an independent sales agent should represent. There are sales agencies out there who carry up to 50 lines or as few as two lines. You have to examine your internal resources to determine whether you have the staffing or the ability to properly represent the lines you're carrying."

Overcoming Misconceptions of the Independent Sales Agency

Through Craig Lindsay's experience as operator of an independent sales agency, he has been approached by a number of companies wanting to work with an agency in Canada to help them create a presence in the Canadian marketplace. Lindsay has found principals of these companies harbour a number of misconceptions about establishing a beachhead in Canada.

#1 "Reps don't spend enough time on my product line."

"A lot of principals or companies in a position of control want to manage or control the individual agency's *activities* within a specific geographic area. This is not their role and can collide with the agent's need to produce concrete *results*," says Lindsay. "If a manufacturer comes to us and says, we want to grow our business by 20%, it shouldn't matter how we achieve the result." Furthermore, Lindsay cites that there's a perception on the part of the company or principal that if we're not always in front of the customer, that "we're not doing our job or penetrating the account. Management should be to the result, not the activity."

#2 "When I'm selling one manufacturer's line, I can't sell another manufacturer's line."

If you represent multiple manufacturers, you are often in a position where you can sell similar lines to the same customer. However, there is a misconception on the part of principals of some companies that if you represent multiple lines, you are just going to represent the lines where you get the highest commissions. "This is definitely not true," says Lindsay. Lindsay and his independent agents use an approach of "synergistic selling." For example, if Lindsay is selling safety glasses to a customer, there's a good chance that person will also need hard

hats. “We use synergy to leverage other business, and that’s what an independent rep firm does.”

#3 “No upfront investment by the principal or the company is needed to launch a product.”

Many small businesses or entrepreneurial startups consider retaining independent agent representatives as a quick and straightforward means for generating revenue within a specific geographical territory or country.

Lindsay says, “I can’t tell you how many times in the past 11 years I’ve had principals, companies or manufacturers say to me, we’d like you to represent our line of products in Canada. When I ask them what **their commission rate** is for specific products and what their Canadian sales are, very often they cannot give me an answer, and they have not even made any attempts as yet to sell in Canada. This means they are relying entirely on the sales agency or agent representative to make an upfront investment, in time, effort and money, where the principal, company or manufacturer is not willing to contribute any money.

“The manufacturer has zero dollar sales, so there is no commission to be earned initially. Their expectation is that we’ll sell their product. Every time we pick up the phone to call a potential client for them, it costs money. Every time we turn the keys in the car to see that potential client, there’s a cost in gas, wear and tear, etc. If we take on that manufacturer and add them to our website or our business cards, there’s a cost. None of these costs is easily quantifiable, but there are very real and obvious expenses involved.”

To offset those upfront costs, Pacesetter builds in a consulting fee, called a flat fee or retainer, which varies depending on the manufacturer and product line.

Lindsay also does careful research before representing a new manufacturer. In a process that typically takes some three months, Pacesetter:

- Sets up an initial interview with the manufacturer. This is not a simple meeting, says Lindsay, but an assessment he likens to going to a dance and deciding if you even want to dance with the person across the floor. Lindsay uses a detailed checklist and questionnaire assessing not only the product line and manufacturer, but also such issues as current sales and sales forecasts, opportunities for growth, and strategy for penetrating the Canadian marketplace.
- Determines if there is a product conflict. Pacesetter’s policy is not to handle a product in conflict with an existing line.
- Consults with the sales team. Lindsay polls his sales reps to find out what they think of the manufacturer and whether they think there are product opportunities.
- Visits the company’s factory, interviews their engineering staff on product design, where they’re going, and what their expectations are.

“If all these things line up, then we have a deal. We want to set up relationships that are long-term,” says Lindsay.

#4 “You can’t compete with manufacturer’s direct sales channel.”

Manufacturers realize they have to get the message to the customer. They don’t realize that using their own employees will cost them not only a salary, but also an **additional** significant investment in annual travel expenses. **“Manufacturers would be wise to look at all of their costs of a direct employee versus utilizing an independent rep force, which typically, would cost significantly less,” says Lindsay.**

Working with Agent Representatives as a Sales Agency Owner or Manager

Recruiting

Lindsay relies mainly on networking, especially with his customers, to find the best sub-agents for the product lines he represents. He supplements networking with traditional methods, such as newspaper advertisements, but has never used a head hunter firm to find sub-agents. He prefers to hire people with effective sales skills which can be applied to the businesses he represents. “I’m always looking for a good salesperson first, whether he has specific experience or not,” says Lindsay. “We are good salespeople who happen to sell safety products. You can have a really good salesperson who doesn’t know the safety business but can learn. You can have someone who knows safety products, but is not a good salesperson. You can teach that skill, but we don’t have the luxury of time or money to teach it.” Pacesetter has been fortunate in finding effective sales representatives with some knowledge of the safety industry.

Training sales representatives on Pacesetter’s business

Lindsay works with his manufacturers to help educate Pacesetter’s sales representatives on specific product lines. Pacesetter offers ongoing product training with the manufacturers to his sales reps. The number of training sessions differs depending on a number of factors: is the manufacturer introducing new product categories? is the product line changing? Training sessions can last as little as a half day up to three days, depending on the complexity of the product.

Training entails detailed sessions on benefits of the product, market opportunities, common objections to the product and how to overcome them, market knowledge of the competitive products to this line. Pacesetter typically is responsible for transportation to training sessions. Once the sales reps arrive at the manufacturer’s site, the manufacturer is responsible for local travel, hotel and meal expenses. The end result is generally a split between Pacesetter and the manufacturer.

The manufacturers, mostly American companies, travel to Canada to train the sales representatives for two days or take them on the road to introduce their product lines. “They learn how to handle objections, find out about the competition – all of that in front of the customer. It’s very practical training,” says Lindsay.

Ergodyne, for instance, runs an excellent session, says Lindsay. “They understand the value of your time, they get you in and out quickly, providing the most information in a reasonable amount of time. Unlike some companies which offer a three-day training session that could be handled in a day and a half, Ergodyne packs all its training into a day and a half, working with you from dawn to dusk. They understand that when you’re out of the sell territory, you’re not making money.”

Training sessions at Ergodyne generally include:

- detailed features and benefits of the product line
- objections to use of the product
- handling the opportunities, and
- hands-on use of the product.

Retaining sales reps through training as a key to retention

Lindsay believes in continual training. He himself took the Certified Professional Manufacturers Representative course from 1997-1999 at a US university to earn his CPMR designation. In one week each year over a three-year period, he covered a cross-section of topics – selling skills, marketing skills, writing a business plan, presentation skills, accounting skills – and had to pass a three-hour written exam at the end of each year. To retain the CPMR designation, Lindsay is required over a three-year period to attend 30 hours of training – called Continuing Education Units - related to his business. The supplemental training can entail practical training sessions offered by industry associations such as MANA, NIRA (North American Industrial Representatives Association) or CPSA on such topics as keys to effective contracts between manufacturers and manufacturers’ representatives, sales management training, seven questions to determine the effectiveness of your organization, better presentation skills, accounting and legal courses, and other sessions to improve agency owner skills. +++

For his sales representatives, Craig Lindsay believes in adopting a proactive approach for his sales representatives. Among the many programs he employs for his sales reps, he:

* Holds an annual sales meeting in different locations across Canada. Past meetings have taken place in Banff, Muskoka, and Quebec City, and this year’s meeting is scheduled in Halifax. The annual meeting typically lasts four days and

is Pacesetter's biggest planning session. Lindsay does a comprehensive SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) review of the business as it relates to the manufacturers. Lindsay and the sales team examine current market conditions and new opportunities such as new product lines and then develops a new sales forecast and develops strategic direction for the business in the coming year. From this overall business plan, sales reps design their own territorial plans and present them to Lindsay for his review and comment to ensure they're aligned with the company's strategic direction.

* Accesses the CPSA Speakers Registry throughout the year to source speakers to bring in for training sessions with CPSA, for example, on honing your closing skills.

* Sets up role-playing scenarios throughout the year. These sessions keep sub-agents attuned to the situations that may arise in their dealings with principals and customers.

* Craig Lindsay, through secondary suppliers has recently made available a few computer/web-based training courses and is considering utilizing this type of technology-based solution in the future. Outside service providers, such as Maximizer, the database management company, provide this training online through password-protected sections on their individual websites.

* Sends all sales representatives as a matter of company policy to CPSA's Skills for Sales Success three-day sales training session.

Lindsay has been working closely with CPSA for a decade, since the association successfully lobbied the federal government to fight a retroactive ruling that would have applied GST to commissions earned from companies outside Canada.

CPSA's Terry Ruffel, who was leading the lobbying effort, called on Lindsay to work with him. Then Ruffel asked him if he would work with CPSA's Agency Advisory Committee. The committee acts as a sounding board for the development of CPSA's products and services for this member segment.

"I got involved with the Agency Advisory Committee for the betterment of our business," says Lindsay. "I truly believe that the independent agency business will be a huge growth area in the next few years because companies and principals just cannot afford the expense of maintaining a sales force on the road with all the associated costs, salaries, commissions, car. We are able to offer them the kind of coverage they need without the exponential increase in costs."

What Advice Does Lindsay Offer To Agency Sales Representatives Who Want To Set Up An Independent Representative Business?

Pacesetter Sales & Associates Ltd. owner Craig Lindsay shares the following advice to achieve and maintain national coverage:

***Determine what you want to do.** “Determine and develop your business model, deciding exactly what you want to do. Wide territory? Lots of product lines? Ontario only? One product line only? One channel? Set a direction and stick with it. That’s what I did: plan, vision, channel.”

***Develop your mission statement.** Part of the message Lindsay's company delivers on its website is that the firm provides "quality 'value-added' service for a select group of principals in the safety and industrial sectors. The company's objective is to provide successful sales/marketing initiatives that reach the desired goals of all parties (principal, distributor and end user).

***Find the right manufacturers for your business and build on your successes one at a time before approaching other principals.** Then take that success and market it with other manufacturers. Complete something first before you approach others.

***Develop a penetration strategy.** The comprehensive strategy that Lindsay and his team have put together includes: utilizing "selected" distribution to cover the market; directing end user penetration in conjunction with distributor sales personnel; developing both distributor field sales and inside sales personnel through constant training and selling initiatives; developing Canadian business plans that harmonize with both principals' and distributor plans; providing principals with market feedback, competitive activities, and marketing ideas; and, targeting and attaining sales goals.

***Invest in your business.** Invest in people, technology, and training. Don’t spare expenses on setting up sophisticated computer relationship software systems. Make it easy for your people to do their jobs effectively by giving them the tools to deliver results. For instance, Pacesetter has his entire staff working on the same software, in addition to cell phone and other communications techniques. You can achieve national coverage only through the use of comprehensive communications tools, says Lindsay.

***Compensate your agent representatives for their efforts.** “When I started the business, I wanted to pay my people as much as I possibly could because they’re the guys out there slogging everyday. You eat what you sell. You see the rewards of what you do. If the owner of the business is taking most of that and stuffing it in his jeans, you don’t feel good about working with that person.” Lindsay makes a point of offering an above industry average commission rate. For his sector, the standard rate is 58-42%, representative to owner. While he doesn’t share his actual commission rate, he says it’s consistently better than industry average. “When you’re treated fairly, you want to work harder for that person.”

*** Involve your people in the decision-making process.** “When a new product line comes to us (I find those and determine what’s right for our business), I involve all the sub-agents. Here’s the product line, here are the manufacturer’s sales, their expectations, what I see as pros and cons. What’s your opinion based on your territory? It’s a democracy. Your representatives have to feel involved and part of the process.”

***Provide principals with the information they need.** It’s not enough to ensure your sales representatives are properly trained and educated. You must also extend those skills to your principals by providing them with valuable market feedback, competitive knowledge, and useful marketing ideas.

Tips For Managing the Agency-Principal Relationship

When Craig Lindsay first decided to set up his own independent sales agency, the principal of one of the companies he approached questioned Lindsay’s ability to establish a fully interactive independent agency covering such a vast geographical area. Lindsay, making a leap of faith in his own abilities since he had never been an independent sales representative, assured the principal that if he signed on with Lindsay that Lindsay would not only hire sales representatives to cover the territory, but also employ a number of techniques to make the agency-principal relationship truly interactive.

“You must create a balance to satisfy the needs of your principals, your customers and your staff,” says Lindsay. Here’s how he creates that balance through ongoing, evolving communications and hands-on management of the principal’s business:

***Communicate effectively.** The world of electronics has made it easier than ever to communicate with customers and principals in different locations and time zones. The downside is that people have forgotten how to pick up the phone, says Lindsay.

Use a variety of communications techniques:

Regular update emails to customers and manufacturers.

- Contact management systems are valuable tools to keep track of calls and customer details and facilitate reporting systems. Databases keep track so that effective reporting is easy.

Regular telephone updates, even if they’re only voice mail messages left for manufacturers.

Regular e-letters with new product features and sales tips.

- Using travel time between sales appointments to phone manufacturers and provide feedback on recent sales calls to keep the manufacturer up-to-date on sales actions.

“I tell my sub-agents that there are a number of different ways to communicate. If manufacturers don’t hear from you, they don’t know that you’re working on their behalf. I advise my guys to send a regular email with update, pick up the phone and call them to keep them informed. There’s no magic to it. We do an electronic newsletter once a quarter to our customer base – not the manufacturers, but the customers for their products. In the old days, Mr. Sales Rep would visit the customer and introduce a new product. Now we do it electronically. We also offer sales tips in the newsletter, things that add value to what we do. That keeps our name **top of mind**, in addition to actually getting in front of them.”

*** Encourage manufacturers to visit your territory.** “We are the eyes and ears of the manufacturer in the field. The manufacturer needs to know what is going on and we have a responsibility to provide feedback to keep the manufacturer informed,” says Lindsay.

Independent representatives need to be prepared and encourage manufacturers to visit their territory. A visit provides the manufacturer with market feedback on products, respect from customers and often creates that critical difference in closing sales.

To take advantage of the visit, a sales representative needs to be proactive and:

- **Be well organized**
Providing an agenda to the manufacturer well in advance of the visit to the territory will keep the manufacturer informed about prospective meetings with background on companies and contacts. This is not the time for cold calls!
- **Be prepared**
Each customer visit should benefit the manufacturer. Offer the manufacturer background information on each meeting and the objectives for each call.
- **Take charge**
During meetings take notes to create the action plan that clearly develops the follow-up that the both the rep and manufacturer will do as a result of each sales call.

***Live up to your commitments.** “Don’t make commitments you can’t keep. Under-promise and overachieve. Don’t commit to things you can’t do. Be honest with people. If there’s a program that’s difficult for you as an independent to implement, don’t take it on. Maintain your integrity.”

*** Get the relationship off to a good start**

- During negotiation phase, a sales representative offers knowledgeable information on the marketing support needed to reach customers. This feedback provides the manufacturer with tips to create the most effective marketing support. A representative can offer the manufacturer recommendations on effective local journals and magazines for advertising and emphasize the importance of providing materials to effectively reach customers, including translations of brochures in French.
- A representative understands that marketing support is needed to reach sales forecasts and lays the groundwork to have effective support in place. A representative knows the terms to take advantage of co-op advertising and special discounts.

*** Offer advice and become the manufacturer or principal's consultant.** A representative is the territory adviser informing manufacturers of changes affecting the manufacturer's product sales, including customer preferences and regulatory changes. Doing business in Canada is surprisingly different from doing business in the U.S. Sub-agents become the Canadian knowledge base for their U.S. principals.

*** Build business.** A healthy relationship between a representative and the manufacturer is built on trust. Providing the manufacturer with a list of prospective customers within a well-established strong manufacturer relationship can generate new business, particularly if the manufacturer harnesses opportunities to assist the rep with marketing support, including a direct mail campaign to reach new customers.

Bottom Line Agency Success at Pacesetter Sales

Craig Lindsay's success is no accident. There is a reason he has grown his business from the original three manufacturers to his current 12.

The key for Lindsay is exhaustive planning and follow-through. He writes an annual business plan, which he follows and reviews carefully to gauge success.

"We write a business plan each year to focus on our growth targets," says Lindsay. "That number could be growing 30% one year or 8% another year – success is meeting those targets. We've had significant growth over 11 years. In the beginning, we doubled sales in one year; it's not realistic to do that today. But each year we determine the potential for growth, what we can do to meet that target, and go out and accomplish it."

As a result of Lindsay's exhaustive planning, Pacesetter has come close to achieving the vision of the original business plan. Working with a staff which has

grown from the original one (Lindsay himself) to 12 sales representatives in territories across the country and two administrative assistants, the company now builds new business strictly on the recommendations of existing customers.

Pacesetter has sustained and grown its business over the past 11 years and consistently shows a positive cash flow and profit.

-end-

+++CPSA in 2003 inked a partnership deal with MANA where CPSA's Skills for Sales Success course would provide the basis and would be offered to members seeking to attain their Certified Professional Sales Representative designation.

Related links

www.pacesettersales.com

Pacesetter Sales CHECKLIST

Winning Strategies for Agency Owners and Managers

Thoroughly research your manufacturers' and principals' businesses. Good luck comes with good management, says Craig Lindsay. Pacesetter works hard to fulfill the needs of his manufacturers and their customers. Pacesetter thoroughly researches the product lines it represents by studying the industry, interviewing customers who use the products, and searching for synergies among the different lines Pacesetter represents. In return, Lindsay is able to offer principals a unique window on the Canadian marketplace and the Canadian way of doing business.

- Make a company policy of high integrity and ethics. These are crucial to growing Pacesetter's business and developing the company's reputation. According to Lindsay, you must always be honest with principals. If there's a program that's difficult for you as an independent to implement, don't take it on. Maintain your integrity. You may not win this piece of business, but others are sure to follow. You must also take responsibility when mistakes occur. Taking responsibility builds credibility. "My expectation is to deal with people honestly and in a forthright manner," says Lindsay. "I lead by example. How do you document every situation where high integrity and ethics are involved? They're involved in every situation."
- Involve your sub-agents in the decision-making process. It is generally Lindsay who sources new product lines for Pacesetter, but when the company enters into an agreement to rep a new line, he involves his entire sales team from coast to coast. He uses electronic communications as well as face-to-face meetings with his sales reps to present the new line, examine the sales figures, discuss the principal's sales expectations for Canada, and explore the pros and cons of adding the line from a territorial perspective.
- Do a lot of little things really well. What are these little things? "Living up to commitments. Doing what you say you're going to do. Under-promising and over-delivering. Attention to detail can make an enormous difference in your success rate in retaining principals and manufacturers."
- Lead by example. Go out and earn your business. Be the first person to work every morning and the last person in at night. Don't expect things to be handed to you on a silver platter. Says Lindsay, "I think a lot of people's expectations are that they can go into a job and make a lot of money and not work that hard. If that's your expectation, I don't think you're going to be successful in our business. Good things happen to those who are prepared to work for them. It's better to get bad breaks

than to wait around for someone to hand your breaks to you. If you're waiting for good things to happen, you're going to miss out on opportunities to succeed."

- Focus on your communications skills and use them to live up to your client commitments. Craig Lindsay's voice mail message promises that he will return calls by 5 p.m. that day, and he makes sure to deliver on that promise. Lindsay advises his sub-agents to build trust and respect through effective communications skills, supported by commitment and follow-through. He also makes a point of saying "thank you" and meaning it. Lindsay asks, when was the last time you said thanks to a customer for his business or heard it from someone you were giving business to?
- Be responsive and timely. It is really easy to hide behind voice mail and e-mail these days and lots of people do. Be someone who can be relied upon. Get back to people quickly even to say, I haven't got an answer, but I am working on one and should have it to you soon.
- Develop lasting relationships. It is testimony to Craig Lindsay's skills as the head of an independent sales agency that Pacesetter has such a high manufacturer retention rate. Of his original three clients, two are still with him, and his new business is all through word of mouth.

Jane Widerman of Jane Widerman Communications Inc. has been a professional writer and editor for 27 years. She has written for most of the major magazine markets in Canada and is currently the editor of the award-winning trade publication, Your Convenience Manager, and online newsletter, convenience central. She has also completed assignments for the federal, Ontario and BC governments in addition to writing and editing newsletters and brochures for both public and private sector clients. In her "spare time," she is a script writer and co-producer for video company Your Life Productions Inc.