

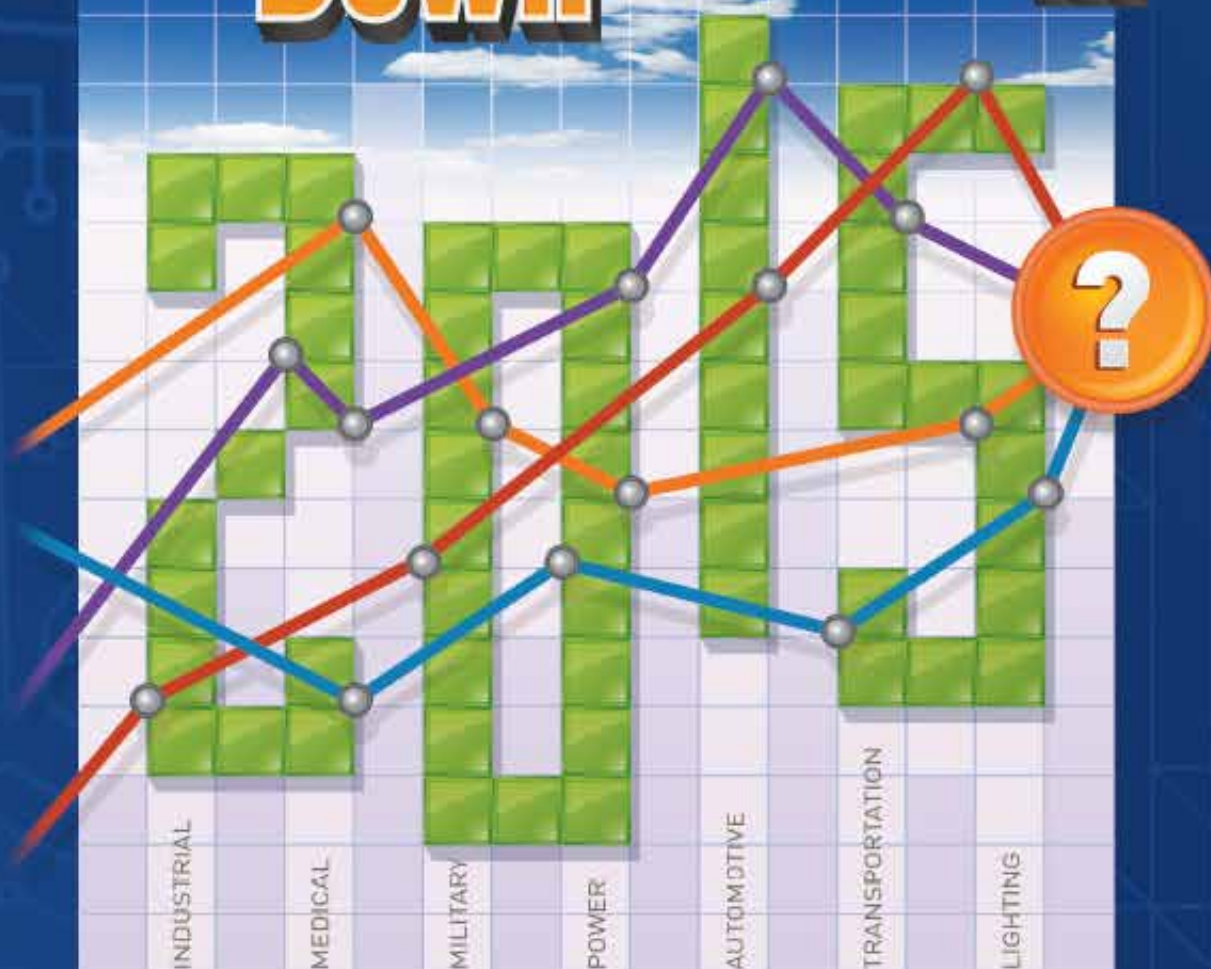
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How ERA members project revenue and market directions



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- Alliance of Manufacturers' Representatives Associations
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- Small Business Legislative Council
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce

■ THE REPRESENTOR (ISSN 1057-0373) (Vol. 26, Issue 1), is published by Electronics Representatives Association, 309 West Washington Street, Suite 500, Chicago, Illinois 60606. First annual subscription per ERA member company or manufacturer member is \$15.00. Additional ERA member company or manufacturer member annual subscriptions are \$12.00 each. Non-member annual subscriptions are \$24.00. Foreign annual subscriptions are \$40.00. Single copies are available at \$6.00 per copy. (All prices quoted are payable in U.S. dollars.) American Express, MasterCard, Visa and Discover charges accepted.

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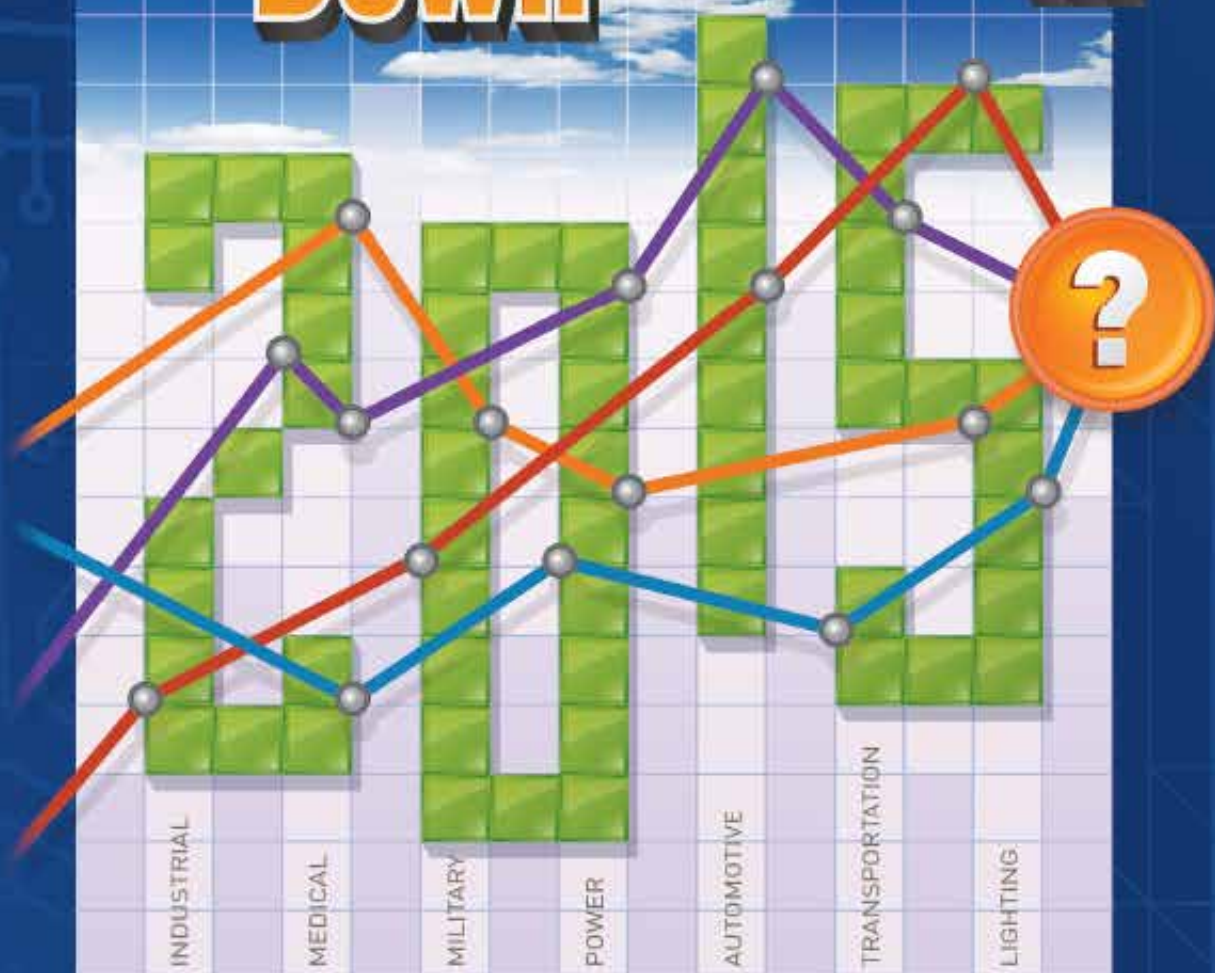
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WINTER 2015

Up, Down or Flat in



How ERA members project revenue and market directions

They are the key questions that have been tumbling around for a while now in the heads of rep firm owners/managers and manufacturing executives throughout the electronics industry — and every other industry for that matter — even before this new year launched into its first quarter.

**“How will our revenue and markets change?”
“Where will the changes originate?”**

About a year ago, IHS, the research and information development firm, projected a 2014 revenue growth rate in the global electronics industry of 5.6 percent. However, IHS predicted that spurt would be followed by a much more conservative annual growth rate of about 2 percent in 2015 to 2017.

Statistics for the 2014 year-end were not yet available as this issue of *The Representor* went to press, but a number of reports from *Electronic Design* and two trade associations — SEMI and the Semiconductor Industry Association — indicate the 2014 industry growth rate could end up being considerably higher than IHS and many others projected. Some early estimates for growth in 2015 range from 4 to 6 percent.

So it seems the industry outlook is quite positive on a worldwide basis, but what are ERA member reps projecting for their own firms, markets and territories? What expectations do manufacturers have in this new year? For the answers, ERA conducted a brief member survey in November. Read on to learn how the responses might or might not match up with your own 2015 projections.

Overall results are positive

This survey was answered by a total of 135 reps and manufacturers. An overwhelming majority of the respondents — 76.4 percent of reps and 92 percent of manufacturers — agree that 2015 will be a year of increased revenue.

No manufacturers expect decreasing revenue, and the remaining 8 percent expect revenue to be flat. Those looking forward to increases cited hikes ranging from as low as 2 percent to as high as 30 percent. The majority, however, are planning on increases of 4 to 10 percent.

Among the rep respondents, 17 percent are looking for revenue to be flat this year, and 6.5 percent are projecting a revenue decline. In the respondent pool, firms of all sizes, geographic territories and product groups are represented, and the predictions of higher, lower or flat revenue are spread across all demographics. So there are no territories or product groups that jump out as clear winners or losers.

Reps were also asked to project whether the percentage of their total revenue from POS will

increase, decrease or remain flat. Of the 109 respondents to this question: 55 percent project increased POS income; 28 percent are looking for POS commissions to remain flat; and 17 percent are preparing for a decrease.

As for market fluctuations and trends, the manufacturers' responses were diverse, depending on their product lines. Perhaps not surprisingly, the military market is projected to be both a source of growth and also possibly a sector in “slight” decline. Active and passive component suppliers and several electromechanical manufacturers see growth in 2015 in military and aerospace sales because they believe funding cuts will be restored, but several other respondents disagree, saying lack of funding could curtail growth and result in continued decline.

A number of component and electromechanical manufacturers are expecting growth in the medical and telecommunications industries, and while a few respondents named automotive as a market that will produce higher sales revenue, one power supply manufacturer feels “the auto market is shrinking.”

Other markets that manufacturers are looking to for increased sales this year are office and home automation, new energy, white goods, networking storage, power distribution, laser radar, synchronous optical networks (SONET) and transportation. The markets in which manufacturers predict sales will decrease in 2015 are laptop computers, servers, printers and televisions.

Much like the manufacturers, the rep responses about markets were varied. Summaries of these follow, grouped by geographic region.

Rep results from the Northeast/Mideast

For reps in the Northeast and Middle Atlantic regions, the medical market is the favorite to expand this year, with a third of respondents saying they expect their sales to grow. One rep calls the medical field “the driving vertical in our market ... [with] the development of many new products in the works.” Another says, “Some of the [medical] startups should continue their growth, and other startups should emerge.”

Right behind the medical market, reps in this region feel military sales will increase, but, as one respondent notes, “only because it can't get any worse.” Another rep comments, “The change to a Republican majority, coupled with the increasing load on our military, will require an increased level of spending.”

The automotive, industrial, energy and government markets also earned high rankings for potential growth from this region's reps. Several believe

(continued on next page)

An overwhelming majority of the respondents — 76.4 percent of reps and 92 percent of manufacturers — agree that 2015 will be a year of increased revenue.

COVER STORY: Up, Down or Flat in 2015?

(continued from previous page)

that at least some sales increases will come from the need for governments of all sizes, as well as transit providers and utilities, to upgrade their security equipment and systems.

Countering the optimism of reps who named military as a growth market in 2015, almost an equal number of respondents feel their military sales will decline, due to budget cuts, government regulations and “government malaise.” Two reps, however, added the caveat that military spending and sales could pick up if “something bad happens” or if “Middle East conflicts continue to escalate.”

For the region as a whole, a number of reps say the move to off-shore manufacturing has diminished the customer base. As one respondent notes, “We see very little business that went off-shore coming back.” And another says, “Manufacturing in the cost-competitive sectors is still moving off-shore to lower cost regions. Reshoring really isn’t happening as it seems to be touted.”

Rep results from the Southeast

Like their fellow reps in the Northeast, survey respondents in the Southeast foresee the medical market as the top source of sales growth in 2015, followed closely by the industrial sector. One respondent notes, “The medical market in Florida is in developmental mode. Despite the movement of some players to off-shore manufacturing, we see the

industry as a significant part of our 2015 revenue.”

A number of Southeastern reps also predict growth in LED lighting and smart meters as well as 3D printing. One rep comments, “3D printing is in its infancy, LED lighting is just scratching the surface ... and smart meters took a backseat recently, but we feel energy conservation will be a topic of much discussion in the coming year.

Other markets projected to be on the upswing this year are automotive, utility metering, home automation, off-road vehicles, white goods and packaging. The military/aerospace market was again named as both growing and in decline. While several reps feel government and commercial space programs show promise, others say government spending cutbacks will have negative effects. One electromechanical rep reports, “Most of our major contractors fear funding for programs will remain on hold or static until after the 2016 election.”

Additional markets identified in the survey as slowing down this year are transportation, material handling, telecommunications, consumer electronics, computers and instrumentation. Several reps also predict that all their markets will be flat.

Rep results from the Midwest

Typical of the “regionalism” that affects markets, ERA’s survey shows that Midwestern reps consider the automotive sector as one of their top choices for sales growth this year. One fortunate rep comments that his firm “has managed to design our components into all of the big three car manufacturers,” and another says, “This industry is up and represents 95 percent of our customers.”

Like all other regions, however, the medical market is the number one segment projected to produce higher sales in 2015. One respondent notes that this is the only field in which his firm is forecasting significant growth, and several others feel sales will increase to meet the needs of an aging population.

Almost a third of the respondents in this region feel the industrial market will likewise be strong this year because, as one rep says, “There are more opportunities for manufacturing growth and designs in the U.S.” Other markets that reps feel optimistic about are LED lighting, energy and power. “Everyone wants more power,” according to one rep whose firm specializes in that field.

Even military/aerospace received a few votes for growth in 2015, but virtually half the Midwest reps participating in the survey feel this market is continuing to decline. They cite government budget cuts and/or difficulty in obtaining funding, “closure of a few locations in our territory,” and sequestration as the culprits causing the market weakness.

A few reps also expect slowdowns in consumer electronics, contract manufacturing — where one rep says supply is greater than demand — and the education sector. This latter prediction, respondents note, is due to both lower spending on technology and because voters are failing to approve bond issues to build new schools.

Like their fellow reps to the north, survey respondents in the Southeast foresee the medical market as the top source of sales growth in 2015 ...



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Rep results from the Mountains/Plaines

Once again, reps in this region — encompassing the Rocky Mountain, Southwest and Plains states — believe the medical market will be among the sales leaders this year, thanks in part to “long-term designs coming into production” and other “strong designs now in process.” But they are also expecting growth in the geophysical, mining, industrial and energy/alternative energy markets.

At least several reps are likewise confident about sales growth in these segments: unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones); intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) equipment; smart appliances; data centers; and all products and applications related to the Internet of Things (IoT), including commercial, medical and industrial usages.

Once more, though, projections about the military/aerospace market were almost evenly split between positive and negative outlooks. One rep expects growth because funding for aerospace is predicted to increase, and another believes the demand for more efficient, cost-effective systems will strengthen the market. On the flip side, a third rep says government spending cutbacks “still affect the market and will not change until the new Congress takes effect in January.” Then, this rep believes, it will be many months after that for the military market to begin to rebound.

Yet another market that received both positive and negative comments from reps in this region is oil and gas. While several reps are looking for growth, several others say that low prices, lower levels of investment in exploration and more regulations are reasons for caution.

Rep results from the West/Northwest

Survey respondents in the West, Pacific Northwest and Canada repeated the most dominant pattern of responses that came from other regions. The medical market is their leading choice for growth in 2015, and they are divided on whether the military/aerospace sector will rise or fall.

One rep supports his projection that both markets will grow, commenting, “There’s always a war, and people are always getting sick, especially the older baby boomers.” Another says, “Medical equipment manufacturers seem to be strong,” and a third adds, “Commercial aerospace is increasing [its] production rates.” But other respondents view the military/aerospace market as “oversold” and continuing to decline because of “political situations.”

Additional markets that reps in this region expect to grow this year are industrial, energy/alternative energy, consumer electronics and transportation, including electric vehicles. About this last market, one rep insists, “Everything is about batteries, portability and charging.”

“Stay-at-home markets” — i.e., not moving to China — will also grow this year, believes an electromechanical rep, because “China has proven to be a problem for all companies in terms of intellectual property disrespect and counterfeiting. The smart

companies today are seeing the impact of that.” Conversely, another rep feels that high-volume production will continue to go overseas, especially in the consumer and industrial sectors.

Markets that reps predict will slow this year, in addition to military/aerospace, include computers — “as tablets and phones take over” — and telecommunications. About the telecom sector, one rep cites reports that infrastructure spending by AT&T and Verizon is expected to be down 20 percent.

Wrapping up

ERA’s survey results indicate there’s a solid year of growth ahead in terms of both total revenue and in certain markets. The medical sector should be more than healthy, but it’s anybody’s guess about military/aerospace. It could begin to come back, in whole or in specific segments, but it could also continue to languish.

For the other many electronics markets, reps and manufacturers predict plenty of upswings and certainly some declines, all primarily depending on a specific region’s customer base. So hang on, everyone ... it’s going to be a fascinating year! ■

This article was written by Katie Boysen, assistant editor of The Representor, and Tess Hill, editor.

The complete results of the ERA survey summarized in this article are available to members at era.org on the Member Resources page.

Once again ... projections about the military/aerospace market were almost evenly split between positive and negative outlooks.

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In ERA's emails: How one rep replied to this question: 'What IS the field sales function today?'



EDITOR'S NOTE: In his Executive Commentary column in the Fall 2014 issue of The Representor, ERA CEO Tom Shanahan pointed out the changes in field sales resulting from the influx of Gen Y into decision-making positions, and he put this question to readers: How do you define and describe today's field sales function?

*The following email response — from **John Mitchell** of the APM Naltron rep firm in Tampa, Fla. — was so thought-provoking and detailed that The Representor is publishing the complete text of Mitchell's message.*

Thank you, John!

In response to your commentary, I have several thoughts on today's field sales function (and the growing task list that now goes with it). Today's field sales function is quickly becoming only a subset (albeit the most important) of what a rep provides to a principal.

Good reps create value by:

- providing fast access to the customer decision-makers, or the sponsors to put the principal in front of the right decision-makers;
- explaining to the customer the benefits of a part or capability faster

and with far more accuracy and conviction than a website ever can;

- navigating the principal's quirky organization to get technical or pricing answers much faster for the customer;
- selling the customer internally to the principal (which is often the harder sell) to make both parties successfully engage to mutual benefit;

- increasing the selling bandwidth of the principal, i.e., doing more deals faster to raise revenue than you could without reps.

We are the grease.

But we have to be in play with our customers, which means we need to hang out where they are to forge relationships. For the older engineers and buyers, that means lobbies, labs and lunches. Nothing has changed here, other than we don't carry the data books anymore. And for my generation, where we hang out first means the web. For Gen X and Y, we need to "online date" first.

Social media is the teaser; email campaigns are the awareness creator of your personal brand; and the insight you provide online is your clincher to begin a relationship. You establish yourself as the expert ... because you ARE.

What's the amount of draft you need on a plastic part to get it out of the tool with this undercut? Can the latest ARM processor handle two high-definition display outputs? Can company XYZ make a thousand of these assemblies a week for me, Mr. Rep, for REAL? Don't just announce products; announce knowledge. Then Gen X and Y will come to us.

In your article, you mention the migration of rep firms to service organizations, yet only sales dollars compensate us. I completely agree that there are significant issues with this compensation for principals not truly committed to the rep model and to your rep firm. We, as reps of the future, have to invest in tools and marketing resources that are specific to each principal to engage customers on the web. Both tools and marketing cost money that doesn't come from today's sales dollars.

With the commitment to engage web followers, we are providing the service of marketers, not just sales. And furthermore, we are the most targeted of marketers because we personally know the customers themselves to whom we refine our principal's pitch. So our hit rate is drastically higher than a search engine hit or an SIC code listing our principals purchase.

Do we get compensated for this highly personalized end-customer marketing effort? Only if it ends up in a win (often three years out if you can find the sale somewhere in the world). What about the brand identity you are building for the principal? Principal, you pay Google for website hits, right? Why not us?

The newest service we provide, the extent to which has recently exploded in the last few years, is data entry. As a relatively young guy in the business, even I have seen the shift in the last few years from a principal knowing you are working for him via your phone interaction or quick email visit report about a customer. Now reps are being measured as good or bad simply by what we have keyed into

(continued on page 16)

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Ken Bellerio
President
Schaffner EMC, Inc.

With so many ERA members, it's not easy to get to know every rep and manufacturer 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 Ken Bellerio, president of Schaffner EMC, headquartered in Edison, N.J. Ken has been involved in the industry for 30 years and with ERA for 15 years.

The Representor asked Ken a few questions about his time in the manufacturing business and his experiences with ERA. Here's what he had to say.

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I have been happily married to my beautiful wife for 32 years and have two adult children who make me proud every day. My son turns 30 soon and works as an operations manager for a chemical manufacturing company, and my daughter recently changed her career path and is now very happy working as a beautician in a high end salon in New Jersey. I have been working for Schaffner EMC, Inc. for 15 years and have been president for the past three years. It was an excellent career choice and is a job that I truly enjoy.

What are some things you enjoy outside of the workplace?

My wife and I love to vacation in California or anywhere there is a winery. We are constantly working toward crossing "must do's" off our bucket list. Our next vacation will hopefully be a trip to Tuscany in Italy. I also wish I had more time for golf which has been a passion since I was 12 years old. The most important thing is spending quality time with my two "furry daughters," Dixie, our English setter, and Honey, our dachshund, who keep me active daily.

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

My first job in the industry was with Alpha Wire exactly 30 years ago, and then I spent 13 years with Newark Electronics as a branch manager in New Jersey. I have been an ERA member since I joined Schaffner 15 years ago and have enjoyed working with many great reps.

How did you become interested in manufacturing for the electronics industry?

Quite honestly, it was by accident. As a communications major in college, I originally intended to make a career in the radio and television broadcasting field. But after we found out that we were expecting our first child, it was necessary to find a "real" job. Alpha Wire had a position in customer service that provided some stability. It was then that I decided to focus on a career selling electronic components as this industry would be a better choice as I began to raise a family.

What have you found to be most rewarding about being in the manufacturing business?

The most rewarding aspect of this business is the people I have met and places that I have seen. I had never imagined that I would travel around the world for business, especially to places like China, Thailand and Istanbul, and meet so many interesting people who have truly changed my life in a positive way. I am also very proud of building such a great Schaffner team of successful people who really enjoy working with each other.

Briefly describe your manufacturing firm?

The Schaffner Group is the global leader in the development and production of solutions which ensure the efficient and reliable operation of

electronic systems. Our broad range of products and services include EMC/EMI components, harmonic filters and magnetic components as well as the development and implementation of customized solutions. Schaffner components are used in energy-efficient drive systems and electronic motor controls, in wind power and photovoltaic systems, rail technology, machine tools and robotics as well as power supplies for numerous electronic devices in sectors such as medical technology or telecommunications.

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

At Schaffner, we constantly strive for excellence in quality in the products and processes from all of our manufacturing facilities in the world. My goals locally in the U.S. are to continue building a strong distribution channel that will support and develop new opportunities for our company as well as working very closely with our rep partners to ensure that goals are met for both of our organizations. I am very positive about our rep organization in the U.S. and proud to say that I have some of the best reps in the business. I am confident that we would not have the success at Schaffner without their support and cooperation as part of the team.

Recently, Schaffner purchased two power magnetics companies in the U.S., MTC in Virginia and Trencos in Ohio, to strengthen our position as a total solutions provider in the world of power quality. These acquisitions have provided many new opportunities for growth for the company and have also provided more products to our key customers in the U.S.

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?

Getting to know some key rep owners like Paul Nielsen, Mark Conley, Robert Logan, Kathie Cahill and Dave Norris, who are actively involved with ERA, has helped me tremendously to run my business in a way that supports the rep community. They have been a big influence in my life and are not only great business partners but good friends as well. Sharing ideas with them on best practices in our industry and being involved with ERA conferences have helped me to manage my position as president at Schaffner and have helped my road to success as a leader.

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

Prior to my entrance into the electronics industry, I worked for several years at the House of Music, a major recording studio in West Orange, N.J., setting up sessions and driving (yes, in a limo) some talented musicians and performers, such as Meatloaf, Cher, Billy Idol, Kool and the Gang, Deodato, Chuck Mangione and the R and B band from the 80s, ConFunkShun.



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New Year's resolutions: Here's what to say 'yes' or 'no' to in 2015

Are you still mulling over your New Year's resolutions for 2015? Or have you given up even making resolutions? In either case, allow me to share a few highlights of the thought-provoking discussion during ERA's November teleforum — "New Year's Resolutions ... and What to Say 'No' to in 2015."

As always, we are deeply grateful to our teleforum facilitator (and sales columnist in *The Representer*), Nicki Weiss of Saleswise, who moderates these "talk-radio" type conversations among several volunteer participants.

For this teleforum, thanks also go to those discussing resolutions with Nicki. They are: Ben Barden and David Barden of Westech Associates, Inc., Mountain View, Cal.; and Scott Lewis, regional sales manager of Leader Tech, Inc.

Nicki launched the discussion by asking Ben, David and Scott what they want to stop doing this year so they remain as focused and productive as possible. Here are their resolutions.

- "Stop mistaking activity for productivity" by checking emails 24-7, and devote time daily totally away from emails.
- "Stop starting my day without a plan;" instead, plan out what needs to get done before all the usual distractions begin.
- "Stop spending too much time on long-winded phone calls" that can be kept down to five minutes or less.
- "Stop doing everything myself" and become better at delegating.
- "Stop being unfit," by letting the "on-the-road" lifestyle take over.

Several additional suggestions from teleforum attendees included these.

- Stop being disorganized, especially when letting papers pile up that never get filed.
- Stop allowing a day to go by without praising a colleague.

The conversation then turned to how to filter out the countless opportunities that arise each day to zero in on the very few most important tasks. Here's how the participants replied when Nicki asked what they do to

make time and space to guide their choices.

- Review both short-term and long-term goals at the start of each week, and take 10 minutes each morning to assess progress.
- Set aside undistracted time to complete the must-do projects. And if you have too many windows open on your computer at one time, that's distracting!
- For rep-principal sales calls, do more specific and more detailed pre-call planning, including determining how the interaction with customers should proceed.

- For all sales calls, be sure to know the questions to ask at each account.

Once again, attendees chimed in with more ideas.

- "Invest time each week in working on my business rather than in my business."
- Follow author Tom Peters' recommendations on time management, i.e.: urgent and important matters warrant 40 percent of your time; important but not urgent deserve 50 percent; urgent but not important should get only 10 percent;

and unimportant, not urgent matters should get zero time.

- "Give people permission to give me constructive feedback."

The final teleforum segment centered on tools to boost efficiency and reduce busy-ness. Ben, David and Scott suggested using:

- Microsoft's Evernote application, which stores notes on the cloud and has a search feature, e.g., to find all prior notes on a specific customer; it also offers many to-do lists and ways to optimize one's workday, e.g., saving articles or information for later reference;
- the Outlook calendar to store emails that need follow-up on a certain day and the to-do list feature to organize emails into priority order; and
- the Auto Preview feature in email programs to easily prioritize or dismiss messages.

Keep in mind that these are only the highlights of this teleforum, but they certainly have me thinking about my "stop doing" and "start doing" lists. How about you?



by Thomas J. Shanahan
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ERA members can download the full audio file of the November teleforum, as well as all previous broadcasts since 2009, on the ERA website at era.org. Click on the Education menu to access the Teleforum Library.

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Looking back and ahead ... and the questions that bring on ‘hmmms!’

It was some busy year, that 2014! And 2015 looks jam-packed too. Let's recap and look ahead.

After an impassioned and well-reasoned plea from John Hutson, CPMR, of The MacInnis Company, ERA once again participated in electronica. John and Holly Myers, CPMR, of Wallace Electronic Sales worked the floor and booths with presentations that they had prepared specifically for Europeans attending the show. With Tom Shanahan and Mark Motsinger, CPMR, also of Wallace Electronic Sales, manning the booth, the four were able to engage 60+ European reps and manufacturers to discuss the benefits of the rep model and the U.S. market.

Notably, they observed that, with the quickly expanding footprint of U.S. distribution in Europe, many of the traditional European “stocking reps” are eager to learn and adopt the U.S. rep model. They would rather work with the U.S. distribution “behe-moth,” than compete with it.

Speaking of learning, ERA has continued and is planning many educational initiatives. In 2014, we published two new white papers (“Thriving on Change 2014” and “Guidelines for Planning a

Territory Visit”), conducted a LinkedIn survey and totally revamped our COLT (Chapter Officer Leadership Training) program which won rave reviews from attendees.

The headquarters team has also established a free teleforum library online and posted an online dictionary of industry terms, acronyms and definitions. Of special note, the six ERA teleforums offered in 2014 had excellent content and exceptional audience interaction.

Now in the planning stages and coming up in 2015 are: “The CFO Project,” an in-depth study of the true cost of field sales, both direct and via rep; six more free teleforums; and numerous surveys, including the annual Rep Firm Employee Compensation survey slated for the first quarter. I am most excited, however, that a committee has been assembled, a chairman named and planning has begun for our next ERA Conference. The conference committee chair, Tom Griffin, CPMR, of Catalyst Sales, and his team have decided to really “shake things up” and hold our next event on Feb. 28 through March 1, 2016,

at the AT&T Conference Center in Austin, Tex. It's a leap year ... it's Texas ... it's going to be big! !

Also in 2015, there are some extremely important transitions coming for ERA.

First, EDS is moving to the Mirage, a great hotel and with a much more efficient layout for the industry's most important gathering. (But, where's the “round bar”?)

Two other VERY important transitions will be occurring this year. For one of those, our ERA Chairman, Mark Conley of O'Donnell Associates North, has volunteered to chair the search committee seeking a successor for ERA's management team, Tom Shanahan and Bob Terwall, who have both decided, “it's time.” We

hope to have a new CEO selected, approved and in place by late 2015. This is probably the most critical decision that ERA will make in a long time.

That said, the other transition is also a vital one! In 2015, Tess Hill, whom I consider the wheel that holds the ERA cogs together, will begin easing into retirement. It should be no surprise that we have hired TWO people to manage her workload! Welcome to Katie Boysen and Stephanie Tierney!

So as we march into 2015, what are some of the things that make us say “hmmm?” Will North American electronics production continue to leave the U.S.? Will energy and Smart Grid spending continue to outpace IT spending? Will the AT&Ts and Verizons continue to decrease infrastructure spending? Thankfully, the Internet of Things will continue to fuel related sensor and wireless sales.

And a little closer to my rep heart: Will reps continue to reshape their portfolios and services to focus on products that are purchased and consumed within the territory? Will they select products and services that more closely align with one or more specific customers ... or on lines that pay more for added services, new business and sales of focus products?

I wish I knew the answers. My pondering makes me say “hmmm” A LOT!! I do know that many accomplishments in 2014 have pointed us in the right direction, and much of what will happen in 2015 will continue that progress. As long as we care, strive to improve and keep pondering, we'll keep saying “hmmm” A LOT!!



by Paul Nielsen, CPMR
Brainard-Nielsen Marketing, Inc.
ERA Board President
e: paul@bnmsales.com

... many accomplishments in 2014 have pointed us in the right direction, and much of what will happen in 2015 will continue that progress. As long as we care, strive to improve and keep pondering, we'll keep saying “hmmm” A LOT!

SCOGGIN IS 2014 RECIPIENT OF JESS SPOONTS – ERA WHITE PIN SCHOLARSHIP

The ERA White Pin Group has announced that Bruce Scoggin, CPMR, of Electro-Rep Associates in Charlotte, N.C., is the 2014 recipient of the Jess Spoonst - ERA White Pin Scholarship. He will receive a \$1,000 grant to fund his continuing education as a professional field sales rep.

"It is an honor and a privilege to recognize Bruce with this award," said Mark Motsinger, CPMR, of Wallace Electronic Sales in Kernersville, N.C., a past president of ERA and the coordinator of the White Pin Group. "He has served his Carolinas chapter and ERA National in countless ways for many years and is always the first one to step up to offer his assistance with any task. He epitomizes the unselfish, enthusiastic volunteerism that Jess Spoonst brought to ERA."

When notified of the award, Scoggin described how he was "blown away," adding "I give ERA programs and networking the credit for helping me navigate the challenges of business survival. Jess Spoonst, and many who mentored him and were mentored by him, created the value in ERA seen in the management conferences and CPMR training. The folks who invested their time, talent and resources developing those programs are the spirit of ERA, and I have truly benefited from all they have shared and given on behalf of the representative sales function ..."

The ERA White Pin Group was established in 1960 and is comprised of member reps who have served in volunteer leadership positions for a minimum of two years. The scholarship award was created in 2006 to honor the group's long-time coordinator, the late E. Jess Spoonst of Dallas, Tex., a half-century veteran of the electronics industry, a past president of ERA and a member of the association's Hall of Fame.

2015 SEMICONDUCTOR REVENUE TO GROW BY 9+ PERCENT

Worldwide semiconductor market revenue is on track to achieve a 9.4 percent expansion this year, with broad-based growth across multiple chip segments driving the best industry performance since 2010, according to IHS Technology, the information, research and analysis organization. IHS says global revenue for 2014 is expected to total \$353.2 billion, up from \$322.8 billion in 2013, according to a preliminary estimate. The nearly double-digit-percentage increase follows respectable growth of 6.4 percent in 2013, a decline of more than 2.0 percent in 2012 and a marginal increase of 1.0 percent in 2011. The performance in 2014 represents the highest rate of annual growth since the 33 percent boom of 2010.

"This is the healthiest the semiconductor business has been in many years, not only in light of the overall growth, but also because of the broad-based nature of the market expansion," said Dale Ford, vice president and chief analyst at IHS. "While the upswing in 2013 was almost entirely driven by growth in a few specific memory segments, the rise in 2014 is built on a widespread increase in demand for a variety of different types of chips."

EDS 2015 IS 'FUTURE FOCUSED'

EDS has established a "Future Focused" theme for its 2015 event, to be held May 12-15 at the Mirage Hotel in Las Vegas, the show's first time at this venue. The show board had previously announced that the start of EDS-related events is being moved back from the traditional Monday to Tuesday to avoid conflicts with Mother's Day on May 10. EDS exhibits and meetings will run Wednesday to Friday. Because of the date pattern change, the annual EDS breakfast program, co-sponsored by ERA and the Electronic Components Industry Association (ECIA), will be held on Thursday morning, May 14.

MRERF SCHEDULES 2015 CSP COURSES

The Manufacturers' Representatives Educational Research Foundation (MRERF) has scheduled its Certified Sales Professional (CSP) courses for the coming year. They will be held: March 24-27 in Irvine, Cal.; April 14-17 in Atlanta, Ga.; Sept. 15-18 in Chicago; and Oct. 6-9 in Portland, Ore. The foundation's Certified Professional Manufacturers' Representative (CPMR) course and its Manufacturers' Best Practices (MBP) course were slated to run in early January in Austin, Tex. For information on all MRERF's educational offerings, visit mrerf.org.

IN MEMORIAM

ERA mourns **Carmin A. Vignola**, a 40-year member and volunteer leader of the association, who passed away in mid-September. He was 83. He was the president of Carmin A. Vignola Associates in the Kansas City area from 1954 to 1989. He was an officer of ERA's Heart of America chapter, a past national vice president of the association, a White Pin member and recipient of he ERA Key Award.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please go to page 20 of this issue to read ERA President Paul Nielsen's special tribute to the late Jim Kimball, the retired vice president of sales and marketing of Sola HD.

Your company can 'borrow' this ERA chapter's planning process

Here we are, into another new year — hard to believe! I've confessed in a previous edition my bias away from New Year's resolutions, and I'll spare you my rationale except to say I lean toward a continuous improvement mentality that isn't tied to flurries of focus at one time in the year that often (at least in my case) lose traction over time. That said, the flipping of the calendar from one year to the next does seem like an appropriate time to reflect on the past year, its hits and misses, and more so to look forward to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. It seems logical that the cover story in this issue is a forward look at 2015.

Recently I had the opportunity to join the leadership group of Chicagoland-Wisconsin ERA as they engaged in an exercise to plan their activities for the foreseeable future. The process they deployed was an interesting one. Rather than leap into program content, meeting plans and the like, they took a step back to ask themselves some broader questions, including:

- 1) What are the changes the industry is experiencing and will experience in the future?
- 2) Given those changes, what are the characteristics of a winner representative firm in that evolving industry scenario?

Based on the outputs from these two foundational queries, the group is in the process of building meeting plans and content for the year ahead that will add value to their membership and encourage new members to participate. It was an interesting exercise that took just a few hours, and the group did a thorough job of anticipating the future and supposing the effects on the representative function. Let me give you a feeling for some of the major highlights.

(For a very thorough assessment of the evolutions underway in our marketplace, I urge you to take the time to review the updated "Thriving on Change" work completed in late 2013. It can be accessed on the ERA website Publications page.)

As to industry changes, the group felt the rapid pace of change would continue on several fronts. Data collection/reporting will not subside. Our industry will continue to evolve in its complexities — with further globalization, the role of distribution advancing (as approved vendor lists shrink), contract manufacturing

expanding and consolidations on all fronts (manufacturers, distributors and representatives) likely. The good news is that a broad proliferation of electronic components is likely in non-traditional markets as sensors take root as a part of the Internet of Things.

Certainly some fundamental demographic shifts are underway among our customers, employees and all partners. Our once-infant electronics industry is well into mid-life, and a new generation now populates it with vastly different approaches than those we baby-boomers grew up with.

If that is our evolving world scenario, the next question becomes, what does this mean to me if I am to survive and thrive? Several worthwhile thoughts came from the chapter group, again with the focus on the rep function.

As a largely asset-less business, rep firms must attract and retain excellent associates who allow their firms to differentiate themselves. This implies a

never-ending commitment to personnel training.

Given the continued trends toward doing more with and for less, a real onus on efficiency of operations exists. A solid business structure must be in place, including fiscally sound practices, strategic planning, succession planning and compensation plans that motivate and align with the strategic direction. Leading rep firms will have the relationships in place that allow them to participate efficiently in the global market. Again, this list goes on as well.

The next step in the planning process for this chapter group is to convert these foundational inputs into action plans for the year ahead. My intent here is not to share with you the plans under development with this ERA chapter. Rather, I want to expose you to the process and encourage you to engage in a similar initiative for your organization, whether that is a rep firm, a manufacturer, a distributor or other. It is easy to mire in the details of your business, the daily fire-fight, the challenges and opportunities. A periodic step back — a "forest for the trees" look — seems appropriate, and the start of the year is a logical time to engage in such an initiative.

ERA will be happy to help as we offer some guidance and facilitation for our rep members. Happy New Year ... make it a great one!



by Robert G. Terwall
ERA Association President
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It is easy to mire in the details of your business ... A periodic step back — a "forest for the trees" look — seems appropriate, and the start of the year is a logical time to engage in such an initiative.

EMAIL RESPONSE: Today's field sales function

(continued from page 8)

CRM of that principal or put on a monthly report spreadsheet. Senior managers of principals today are data hungry for reports, since that is what their MBAs have taught them — except we, as reps, are an out-sourced sales team and are not compensated to fill out CRM systems or overly burdensome reports.

We don't have the luxury of collecting a guaranteed paycheck like a direct employee despite how much of our selling time is diminished due to paperwork. Why aren't we being compensated for the very real extra man hours of work required to keep these systems up to date?

Have you had a conversation with your principal for 10 minutes, at the end of which he says, "Can you put this all in Salesforce.com and also send me an email about it?" C'mon man, we just talked about it. Our time is not free. And wait, aren't these principals' CRMs collecting our contacts too? Wasn't that my intellectual property that I just handed over? Tell me why I am doing that for free again?

The solution? One word: contracts.

The independent manufacturer's rep contract has barely changed in 30 years. Thirty-day termination clauses still apply to deals that took three-plus years to design and close. You pioneer a line in your territory, only to be terminated when the real dollars start flowing because now there is enough business to hire a direct guy. That direct guy, by the way, has all the contacts in your territory that you entered into the principal's CRM system and never got paid for.

Fellow reps, please tell me why we are not fixing our contracts for those lines not truly committed to the rep model? Here are some examples of fixes.

- For significant pioneering deals where design cycles take years and are above a certain dollar threshold, you will pay me for equal term on the noted design win part number, regardless of prior termi-

nation of our relationship. Or you pay me \$x per sales call and email related to this deal instead. I built your brand at this customer to get this deal for us. Now you are backing out because your management has changed and doesn't like reps. Not fair.

- Have a CRM you want me to keep filled out? I'll need a 1 percent kicker on my commission rate to make up for lost selling time or the hiring of an administrative assistant.

- We are going to personally tailor marketing pitches to each customer and will provide you click-through feedback which you can track to samples ordered or quotes generated, but this campaign is going to cost one week of marketing time, billable at \$50 an hour. I'll split the cost with you. Please add \$1,000 this month to the commission check.

- Upon termination, all customer information will be erased from your CRM just as I provide your selling materials and other IP back to you.

I hear a lot of older reps constantly reminisce about "the good old days when relationships mattered and people bought from people, not spreadsheets." Then I hear complaining about the problems with our rep model in today's world. Let's channel that energy instead to fix our model, because it's never going to be the way it was again.

Today's rep is a salesperson, a marketer, a consultant, a report generator and a manager. We should be paid as such, or the industry won't survive.

How you get in front of the customer has changed, and whether you get paid for your success has gotten a lot more complicated. It's hard work.

But tools do exist. People do buy from people, and relationships still matter. To fix it, united we stand. And of course, divided we fall. Now let's get to it. ■

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A rep's telltale signs of looming termination: What can be done?

Most terminations are telegraphed. Reps must pay attention to the warning signs. Consider Roger Rep's plight.

A classic termination scenario

Other principals seem to come and go, but not for Roger's most dependable and lucrative line, Batteries Unlimited of Louisiana, Ltd. (BULL). For over 19 years, BULL provided Roger a consistent source of both steady income and valuable relationships.

While Roger's territory continued to see moderate growth, the overall BULL sales were flat last year. He heard the Southeast rep had been terminated. She had repped BULL nearly as long as Roger. Talk of a merger began to pick up. Or was it a takeover? If so, would Roger be kept on? Roger's longtime regional sales manager, Billy, seemed a bit distant on the phone. Was he nervous?

An unexpected email arrived from the recently-revamped national office of BULL. Roger tried to remember the last time a corporate email like this was sent. It seems Billy was out, and a top-to-bottom evaluation of the sales channel was underway. As part of this process, Roger should expect officials from the corporate office to visit his territory sometime next week. They will want him to introduce them to the leads on his key accounts.

The next Tuesday, a follow-up email introduces Roger to the new BULL regional manager, who will be in his office at 8:30 Wednesday to begin the drive-around to make personal visits. The name strikes Roger as familiar. Isn't he the national sales manager's nephew? Or maybe her brother-in-law?

One week later, the new regional manager sends an email requesting "Top 10" lists within 14 days. He wants not only the contact people from Roger's largest customers, but also his largest potential customers. There is no "thank you for the introductory meeting" or other banal courtesy included in the email.

If the drive-around, during which the regional manager barely looked at Roger, didn't sound a loud enough alarm, surely this "request" does. Yet, what's the alternative? Change is clearly in the air, and Roger decides the best way to reach his 20th anniversary with BULL must be to cooperate with the new regime. So he dutifully prepares the lists, mutters a quick prayer that he doesn't live to regret it, and fires off the requested email response on the 14th day.

The next communication from BULL arrives not by email, but by certified U.S. mail. It's the 30-day notice of termination. But don't worry, Roger, because BULL appreciates the longstanding relationship and will pay commissions on orders that ship out for 60 days after the effective date of termination. All he has to do is sign the enclosed paperwork, return all samples and promotional literature, and work with the regional manager to transition accounts on an as-needed basis. His dreams of a 20th year silver BULL watch and wall plaque shattered, Roger finally decides to reach out for help.

Monday morning quarterbacking

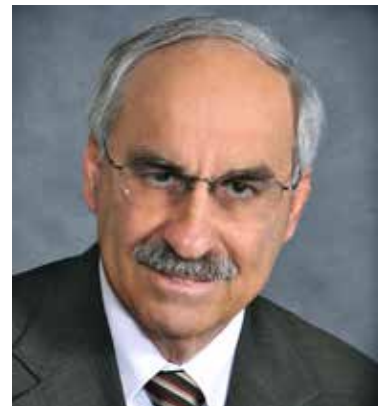
Could any of this have been prevented? Even exercising perfect 20/20 hindsight, Roger appeared unlikely to ward off termination under this all-too-common, end-of-the-line scenario. However, some greater care or perhaps consultations with counsel, may have left Roger better positioned to negotiate with BULL and move on with his post-termination career.

Upon learning of BULL's possible merger or sale, Roger might have dug out his rep contract to review what it says about a change of control. Many rep contracts will automatically carry over the rights and responsibilities of a manufacturer to any successor. A merger with another entity or even the acquisition of BULL by a competitor does not have to spell the end of the relationship. Other rep contracts will enable the rep to immediately cancel, which may also serve a strategic interest. If Roger had kept up with other potential opportunities, this development may have furnished an opportunity to pursue them.

The demand for corporate representatives to tour the territory with Roger and get introduced to the key contacts is probably not specifically addressed in the rep agreement. Generally, choosing to accompany reps in the field is within a manufacturer's discretion. And if handled correctly, they can even be productive. While undesirable and frequently an ominous sign, demanding a list of contacts from a rep's largest customers is also usually within a manufacturer's prerogative. Roger should have asked himself what benign purpose is served by this request, and if he could find none, read the writing on the wall.

Calling for a list of *prospects* in the territory, the clearest red flag waved by BULL, is rarely appropriate. Such a request is unlikely to find

(continued on page 24)



by Gerald M. Newman
ERA General Counsel

Gerald M. Newman, partner in the law firm of Schoenberg, Finkel, Newman & Rosenberg, LLC, serves as general counsel to ERA and is a regular contributor to The Representor. He participates in Expert Access, the program that offers telephone consultations to ERA members.

Gerry co-authored this article with his partner, Adam Glazer.

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Adam Glazer

A book review and recommendation by Dan Beaulieu

The Truth Doesn't Have to Hurt: How to Use Criticism to Strengthen Relationships, Improve Performance and Promote Change

by Deb Bright

Copyright: 2014 by Amacom

Price: Hard Cover: \$17.95 • Kindle: \$9.99 • 244 pages

Reading this book was a very pleasant surprise. I have to acknowledge that I approached reading it with some trepidation. I mean, the topic is criticism, for crying out loud! Who wants to read about criticism? But what it is really about is communication — not plain old communicating, but the hard stuff. It's the stuff you have to work through when you're telling people they're not doing a good job. For instance, you have to deal with things like back talk or arguments or even crying by the person you are criticizing. The book discusses difficult conversations we all have to have as managers. The things we can learn here apply to all facets of our lives.

This book is about delivering that tough message in the best way at the best time. It is about effective talking — something we can all learn more about. It is also about the right way to do things. I particularly liked the last chapter that deals with handling difficult situations. We have all had them. If you're like me, things have not always gone that well.

Here are a couple of tidbits of advice from that chapter on handling difficult situations:

- If the receiver has low vocabulary skills: Ask the receiver to repeat back to you what corrective action he or she is expected to take.
- If the heat of the conversation is escalating: Stop talking, and politely ask if it's possible to "hit the reset button" or postpone the discussion.

All good stuff, right? Now that I've read it, I realize that this is, in fact, one of the most important books I have ever read. Now that I think about my initial reaction, I guess what I was thinking was, "Why do I need a book about this? I already know what I'm doing. What's next? A book on walking?"

But now this is not how I feel at all. The book demonstrates how to correctly convey the difficult message while also making certain there is nothing personal in your discussion and that the message is heard. The author takes you through a complete and comprehensive plan for doing it right. Here are some recommendations to get you started:

- Think before you speak.
- Consider levels of mutual respect.
- Know how to approach the receiver.
- Clarify what actions the receiver needs to take.
- Show empathy when giving criticism.
- Show value when giving criticism.
- Keep your purpose front and center.
- Be timely in delivering your criticism.
- Make the level of criticism match the occasion.
- Provide specifics.



These are the top 10 suggestions to come out of this book. I would recommend that you keep this list on hand because we all need to be reminded of these simple guidelines.

One thing I can guarantee is that there will still be plenty of difficult discussions in your future, whether it be firing one of your salespeople or having to talk to your son about the way he is handling money. You will be facing tough discussions with the people you work with and the people you love. Do yourself a favor, and make sure you have these suggestions to rely on before having those discussions. It will help make that difficult conversation go so much easier. I promise you.

Dan Beaulieu is the president and founder of D.B. Management L.L.C., 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 danbeaulieu@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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- ERA Conference - Feb. 28 - March 1, 2016

Some rep firm bosses need to look in the mirror

Have you ever worked for a rep firm/agency boss who didn't have a clue how he or she affected the people around them? You know, the one who yells at team members, ignores them, or constantly tells them what to do, and thinks motivation consists of a chart comparing sales performances. How could they not recognize that their methods lead to low numbers and an apathetic staff?

Some recent research proposes that they can't help themselves — they just aren't aware that they are being jerks. In a recent article by Julia Kirby, senior editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, it explains why this is. Julia discusses the studies of apes and monkeys, which reveal that when a group is threatened, the subordinates look obsessively toward the group leader, watching for indications of how to respond. Even in times of relative calm, baboons do a visual check of their alpha-male two or three times per minute.

However, the alpha does not return the attention. Humans have evolved a bit beyond the need to check on the boss every 20 seconds, but the basic phenomenon remains that subordinates study the behavior of bosses far more closely than bosses study subordinates. For instance, secretaries know much more about their bosses, much like graduate students know more about their advisers.

The article also quotes Princeton psychologist Susan Fiske, who suggests that, like our fellow primates, "People pay attention to those who control their outcomes. In an effort to predict and possibly influence what is going to happen to them, people gather information about those with power."

The best rep firm bosses realize that they are in the limelight and that they can suffer blind spots about themselves and their organizations. Here are three methods I've seen good rep firm bosses use to become more mindful of their impact.

1. They take the blinders off.

All human beings suffer from "self-enhancement bias," believing that they are better than their fellow travelers and have a hard

time accepting any evidence to the contrary.

Team members, superiors and customers consistently provide better information than the boss about his or her own strengths, weaknesses and quirks. The *Harvard Business Review* article noted the results of a study of naval officers, in which peers more successfully predicted which officers would receive early promotions than the officers predicted in their own self-evaluations.

Good rep firm bosses ask those around them about their performance.

2. They find ways to be in-tune with the people they lead.

Effective rep firm bosses devote real energy to reading expressions, noting behaviors and helping their people think independently and express themselves freely.

Especially in troubled times, good bosses realize that their people are looking for them more and more for compassionate help in predicting events, understanding what's going on and gaining control over the outcomes.

Good rep firm bosses regularly ask, "How can I do better?" or "What can I do to be a better leader of this group?"

Then they listen to the answers and act on the suggestions.

3. They understand that exhaustion contributes to behaving like a jerk.

It's a badge of honor to say: "I'm so busy," or "I worked all weekend."

I see people eating unhealthy breakfasts and lunches at their desks or not eating at all. Not taking care of yourself can lead to exhaustion with all kinds of unintended results, including how you treat others at work.

If you need a tune-up, or a complete overhaul, find a buddy to partner with so that you can elevate both your health and your interactions with others.

Talk back: What are your thoughts? What are the signs of a rep firm boss in-tune with reality? Alternatively, what are the signs of a boss still living in a fool's paradise?



by Nicki Weiss
Certified Professional Sales Management Coach and Master Trainer

Nicki Weiss is an internationally recognized Certified Professional Sales and Leadership Coach, Master Trainer, thought leader, speaker and facilitator. Since 1992, she has trained and coached more than 20,000 business leaders, sales teams and reps. Nicki has a particular passion for working with manufacturers, distributors and rep firms in the electronics industry.

Nicki is ERA's sales consultant, the brainchild and facilitator of ERA's free teleforum programs and the founder of the SalesWise Academy. Every day, leaders wake up knowing they, their technical reps and field sales engineers need to sharpen their focus and their skills. But they don't have the tools, resources or patience to continually help enhance their strategy, communication and relationship building skills. The SalesWise Academy fills that void and delivers those skill-building lessons. To learn more, go to saleswise.ca or call 416-778-4145

IN MEMORIAM

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following notice and comments were provided to The Representative by ERA President Paul Nielsen, CPMR.

Good-bye to Jim Kimball

One of the many benefits of being the president of ERA is that I get to use my clout to get extra space in *The Representative*. In this case, I'm using that space to remember an industry giant and friend.

Jim Kimball passed away recently in Las Vegas. Jim left our industry for retirement in 1993, so many of you didn't know him. But, for us old timers, we remember one of the last cigar-chomping, martini-drinking (absolutely Absolut) old school sales leaders — a man who believed that if you work hard, you deserve to play hard. He also believed in moving business forward, not accolades.

More importantly, we remember the man described as “a mentor,” “a leader,” “a task master,” “a friend,” “an honest broker” “a joy to do business with” and “a very professional sales executive.” More than a few have told me that he gave them a “great start on a great career,” and “he was the best boss I ever had.” A few also mentioned he was a “terrible golfer!”

For purposes of this audience, it's also important to recall that Jim was a staunch supporter of reps and a great ally of distributors. He started at ITW, where he worked with Jack Roser, founder of Otto Engineering, and he was later hired by Joe Sola (yes, there was a Mr. Sola in the early 60s). Jim retired from Sola as vice president of sales and marketing in 1993.

During those years at Sola, he was a major force behind building an iconic brand name and thriving electronic and electrical sales channels. I know his amazing work ethic and attitude were integral to his success. He was in the office, cigar lit, at 6 a.m. every day, reviewing numbers, making phone calls and EXPECTING phone calls. If you weren't at least 15 minutes early for a Kimball appointment, you were late! If you knew Jim Kimball, you knew “Kimball Time.”

I believe, however, that his success also stemmed in great part from his respect for the role reps and distributors played in his company's sales success. He directed his people to work with the reps, to teach the reps, but also to learn from the reps. (And he had some great reps, including Merchant, Brown, Trinkle, Erickson, McCoy and even Kunz to name a few.) He was honestly and openly happy when he paid big commissions, commenting, “You make more, Sola makes more.” He knew what sales was all about.

He also knew the benefits of a strong distributor partnership. Jim aggressively pursued inventory, margin, field engagement and promotional programs that put Sola at the forefront in both the electronic and electrical channels. To Jim, it was pretty simple: “You sell more, I sell more ... there's plenty to go around.” There was no greed, no ego in Jim Kimball.

For my part, I fondly remember Jim as an honest, straightforward bear of a guy who didn't have a lot of time for B.S. He was a great principal who appreciated and respected what you did, and he let you know, in a straightforward discussion, when he didn't. He adored his wife, chuckled knowingly at his kids and enjoyed his friends. Jim's laugh was more like the growl of a bear, literally. When with Jim, you heard that laugh — a lot. I'll miss him.

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Here are the 2014 issues that will affect 2015 taxes

Toward the end of 2014, some issues arose which will affect 2015 taxes. We discuss them here beginning with perhaps the most startling item that affects businesses, the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare.

Critical change in the Affordable Care Act

This change, which has received little publicity, contains a clause eliminating a frequently-used section of the tax law pertaining to the reimbursement of health insurance for employees. Let's consider a common example. A married couple both have access to health insurance coverage through each of their separate employers. If one spouse accepts his/her firm's family health insurance plan, the other spouse may be reimbursed by his/her employer for what would have been the premium. This payment has always been tax-free. No more! This will no longer be the case. The reimbursement will be considered taxable income to the spouse declining his/her firm's health insurance. The penalty to the employer for continuing to reimburse at a tax-free rate can be \$100 per day!

Congress' objective (and this is surely objectionable) was to force companies into taking on a group insurance policy. There is no exclusion for less than 50 employees. Of course, a sole employee or a spousal couple without other employees can still have their own insurance paid by their company. A medical expense reimbursement plan is also not affected. But a reimbursement in lieu of a group medical plan is no longer acceptable. The employer is required to withhold payroll, federal and state income taxes on that reimbursement or be fined. Apparently, final regulations indicate one exclusion: reimbursements are allowed only to help an employee afford a premium payment required by the company that he/she otherwise would be unable to pay.

Other changes for 2015

Here are some of the other important annual changes for this year.

- The maximum wage for Social Security tax (FICA) is \$118,500 (up from \$117,000).
- The 401(k) wage deduction is now up to a maximum of \$18,000 with an additional \$6,000 for those over age 50.
- The maximum IRA contribution is now \$5,500 with an additional \$1,000 for those over age 50.
- For profit-sharing and SEP purposes, the maximum wage that is eligible for contribution is \$265,000, and the maximum contribution for

an individual is \$53,000.

- The new auto mileage allowance is 57.5 cents per business mile.

Recent court cases

One of the more technically challenging issues in the tax law was presented in a recent court case. A lady took over a house from her brother who had lived in the house for a number of years but could no longer afford it. She didn't buy the house from him but lived in it and paid all the expenses. The IRS disallowed the mortgage interest deduction on her return because she did not own the house. There was no formal arrangement with her brother to pay the mortgage. Payment of the mortgage is not enough for a deduction; there must also be a requirement to pay. This should also apply to real estate taxes, though that issue did not arise in this case.

Finally, there has been some recent activity with regard to "hobby losses." The IRS disallows business losses whenever it appears that there is no intent over a five-year period to earn a profit. This could be true of any business, and it is a long-term problem for the IRS because the decision of whether a business is run for profit is often in the mind of the owner. The IRS therefore relies on outward signs of activity. Is the owner actively trying to create income, control expenses and grow the business, or is he/she just having fun or trying to deduct personal expenses from his/her tax return?

In two recent court cases, the IRS lost. The first one was a race horse farm — one of the IRS favorites for attack. In this case, the owner kept meticulous books, studied books on the business, researched horses before buying them and hired a well-known and regarded trainer. The court believed that he was on-track (terrible pun) to succeed and therefore ruled in the taxpayer's favor. In the second case, the owner's company invested in the auto racing career of the owner's son and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in support and in promoting the company products on the son's car. The IRS took a dim view and disallowed the expenses. The court determined that: (a) the son was succeeding — he was qualifying for better races and was earning a name for himself; and (b) he was getting other sponsors unrelated to the family.

These cases point out that proper record keeping and earnestly performing acts that indicate the intent to succeed can win the day. One does not always succeed, but a devotion to trying will go a long way to beat the IRS.



by Stanton B. Herzog, CPA
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Stanton B. Herzog, CPA, principal in the firm of Applebaum, Herzog & Associates, P.C., Northbrook, Ill., serves as ERA's accountant and is a regular contributor to The Representor. He is available to speak at chapter or group meetings on a variety of financial and tax-related topics. He also participates in Expert Access, the program that offers telephone consultations to ERA members.

You can call Stan Herzog at 847-564-1040, fax him at 847-564-1041, or email him at sherzog@theahagroup.com.



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.

CAROLINAS

The chapter hosted a Dec. 8 free program event regarding social media. It was titled “Social Media ‘Swap Shop:’ How LinkedIn and Other Tools Are Being Used in Today’s Electronics Industry.” The program moderator was Bruce Scoggin, CPMR, of Electro-Rep Associates, Inc., who reviewed the results of ERA’s recent LinkedIn survey and led the discussion among attendees regarding all social media usage.

Carolinas also held its final networking breakfast of 2014 in Charlotte in mid-December. The breakfasts, for both reps and distributors, will continue throughout 2015 in both Raleigh and Charlotte.

CHICAGOLAND - WISCONSIN

Chicagoland-Wisconsin board members participated in a strategic planning workshop in late October. Bob Terwall, ERA’s association president, served as facilitator for that meeting which resulted in a plan for 2015 for both educational programming and membership development. The chapter is also already planning its fourth annual Cubs-Brewers baseball outing this August at Wrigley Field.

EMPIRE STATE

Reps, distributors and guests attended Empire State’s annual holiday party in mid-December at the Hilton Garden Inn in Pittsford, N.Y. Among the “gifts” given away in a drawing at the event were two tickets to the chapter’s annual Debbie Henry Memorial Golf Tournament.

NEW ENGLAND

As a result of New England ERA’s program that was co-sponsored with ECIA in May, the chapter is considering other joint activities. These include an all-industry charitable golf tournament, a joint DTAM data collection project and other educational events.

The chapter has also formed a rep-distributor committee to make recommendations to the board of directors regarding future activities and initiatives. A holiday gathering was held in December at which John Hutson, CPMR, of The MacInnis Company, shared his observations from his November visit to electronica, the world’s largest electronics trade show. The event is held in Munich every other year.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

The Northern California chapter hosted its 54th Electronics Industry Mixer and Charity Event in early December. Reps, distributors and manufacturers participated in the fundraiser for the benefit of the Lucile Packard and Oakland Children’s Hospitals. This is the longest-running yearly event sponsored by any ERA chapter and has raised more than \$100,000 for the two hospitals.

OHIO

Ohio ERA sponsored a program in mid-November at the Montgomery Inn in Cincinnati. The presentation was titled “Social Media Marketing for Businesses.” The guest speaker was Matt Plapp, president of the Driven Media Solutions marketing firm.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

A mid-November event featured a presentation focused on “The Affordable Care Act and Your Business.” The chapter’s annual planning meeting was conducted Dec. 10, and the regularly-scheduled business-social breakfasts are continuing every Friday in Orange County and every second Friday in Calabasas.

SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS

St. Louis members and guests attended a mid-November happy hour at the Trainwreck Saloon in Westport. The chapter also hosted a Christmas dinner on Dec. 16 at Paul Minneo’s in Westport Plaza.

Chapter of the Year entries due soon

All ERA chapter officers and managers: Your Chapter of the Year entries covering 2014 activities and projects will be due March 2, 2015. Please watch for the announcement in mid-January.

Chapters can submit as many entries as they wish for recognition in one of four judging categories: Education; Marketing Services; Membership and Member Services; and Special Projects. Judging of the entries will be conducted in mid-March, and award recipients will be announced later that month. Chapters selected for awards earn a full-tuition scholarship to ERA’s Chapter Officers Leadership Training (COLT) program.

For details, email Tess Hill at thill@era.org.

Follow these tips to learn new technology (or anything else, for that matter)

As entrepreneurs, we experience new opportunities unfolding daily. New technologies emerge regularly that we need to master in order to succeed. These opportunities are wonderful, but sometimes they can be intimidating.

I often hear people say they are “too old” to learn. They’ll trot out that tired and now-psychologically-discredited ditty, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” Horsefeathers!

So, how do you do it? Here are 10 steps that can help you embrace learning as a competitive advantage and life-giving force.

1. Have an open mind.

This is critical! You can’t reach out with folded arms. Change your thinking from “I can’t do that” to “I’ll figure out a way to make that happen.” I like to call this moving from “no way” to “not yet” thinking. Instead of telling yourself why you can’t do it, tell yourself you might not be able to do it yet, but you’re willing to pay the price. Take courses, hire professionals, read books, watch educational videos and do whatever is necessary to learn new skills that help you.

2. Get help from the best.

You don’t have to do it on your own. Today we have access to the best brainpower through books, audio-video recordings and live coaching. Be willing to part with your TME (Time, Money and Energy) to get what you need. Find the people who know what you need to know and be willing to pay them to help you. Hire professionals through PayPal, WorldPay, Bitcoin or other technologies. Use tools like Skype or Google+ Hangouts. Saturate your mind with books, magazines and quality learning.

3. Be willing to give up activities that don’t help you.

This is a tough one. It is so easy to be drawn to a dramatic story on the news. Turn off that radio and your TV. Fill that wasted time with learning from great sources. Learn market-valued skills so people want to work with you!

4. Focus!

You’ve got to focus to achieve mastery. You could try to trick yourself into believing you can, but psychologists tell us even over-achieving salespeople can’t multi-task. Shut off your social media, let your phone calls go to voice mail, and pour yourself into the task at hand.

This is part of paying the price, and it is well worth it.

5. Practice.

There’s an old Russian saying, “Repetition is the mother of learning.” That applies to us today. You have to practice the right way (think coaching!). I think of the words of my judo instructor from years ago: “Do it 1,000 times until it becomes natural. Then do it another 1,000 times!”

6. Play with YouTube.

YouTube has to be one of the greatest “how-to-learn” tools we’ve seen in the past 50 years. Be willing to wade through some of the junk videos to find the gems. Pay the price, and spend time to learn through this rich resource.

7. Have fun with immersion.

I’m currently studying Spanish. I find that the more I experience words and phrases from books, apps on my iPhone, talking with native Spanish speakers, watching Spanish videos and other exposure to the language, the better I do. Find multiple ways to saturate your mind with the topic you want to learn. This will facilitate your learning and accelerate the process.

8. Use mind mapping to get an advantage.

My friend, Phil Chambers, is the world mind mapping champion. He describes this tool as a way to learn great amounts of information in a visual form. It was developed by thought leader Tony Buzan. Mind mapping is a great way to organize the details and learn best. Google this one and learn about it.

9. Don’t give up!

Have an aggressive and determined attitude toward learning. There are times when you’ll meet what Steven Pressfield calls “The Resistance” in his book, *Turning Pro*. Eventually, you’ll experience that wet-blanket, “I don’t want to do this” kind of thinking. Embracing a “never-say-no” attitude will motivate you.

10. Have fun!

Always remember why you’re learning. If it isn’t fun, you decrease learning. Keep it fun in productive ways that keep you motivated.

Learning gives you a strong competitive advantage today. It also keeps you alive mentally. Go for it!



by Terry Brock

Terry Brock is a marketing coach who helps business owners market more effectively leveraging technology. He shows busy professionals how to squeeze more out of their busy days by using the right rules and tools.

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LEGALLY SPEAKING: Looming termination

(continued from page 17)

support either in the rep agreement or in the law. Just as designs for future products or pricing schemes are considered the manufacturer's intellectual property, lists of customer prospects may be viewed as the rep's intellectual property. After all, these prospects, developed by a rep from servicing a territory for years and investing significant resources to build up a knowledgeable base of contacts, are hardly proprietary to the manufacturer. Roger may have been well-advised to resist this demand — perhaps by pushing back at BULL's rationale for seeking it.

As for the offer to pay commissions for 60 days post-termination, this is a matter typically governed by the rep contract. Is BULL actually making a generous offer, or does the contract already require such payments? The contract may contain a 90 or 120-day shipment provision. Or it could require commissions to be paid on orders received, not shipped, for 60 or more days after termination, regardless of when shipment takes place. Beware of offers made to quickly wrap things up upon termination.

Finally, the paperwork to be signed could contain any number of traps and should be very carefully examined. To receive the promised benefits, including some form of severance payment, Roger may find that BULL has slipped in a post-termination, non-compete period. Or perhaps he is subject to getting drafted back into service for BULL on some non-commissioned basis, if the company needs help with transitioning the territory at some point during an unlimited, "as needed" period.

Maybe BULL is seeking some post-termination indemnity agreement from Roger, and on a retroactive basis. BULL may be looking for retroactive compensation adjustments based upon difficulties with a customer. For good reason, severance agreements are usually scoured over by attorneys.

The severance deal offered by BULL is, after all, its opening offer. Roger should know he is in a reasonable position to counter. BULL is the party seeking to obtain a full release of all claims from Roger on his way out, and the manufacturer should be willing to negotiate in order to secure peace, following its unceremonious termination of a longtime rep.

Taking the BULL by the horns

Perhaps the most important function to be served by reviewing Roger's dusty contract with BULL is to determine what it doesn't say about post-termination commissions. Determining whether Roger has a claim to recover such commissions beyond the 30 or 60 days set out in the contract may enable him to go on the offensive with BULL, or he may at least strengthen his hand in trying to negotiate favorable parting terms after nearly 20 years as its rep.

While many rep contracts specify how commissions are to be paid on orders or shipments during these initial 30 or 60 days after termination, they often do not address orders procured by a rep pre-termination that do not come in until long after the termination is effective. Reps who invest years of time and money to create demand for a product and then face termination may have a right to recover more than 30 or 60 days of commissions under the common law procuring cause doctrine.

Courts in the many jurisdictions that follow this doctrine may read into rep contracts — even contracts that address orders arriving within the first 30-60 days after termination but do not expressly bar or limit post-termination commissions thereafter — a right to recover such commissions. This legal right is based upon the concept that the manufacturer otherwise recovers an unfair windfall by terminating the rep who procured the business, expecting the sales to prove commissionable. If the parties did not agree that commissions would be paid for *only* 30 or 60 days, then a manufacturer enjoying continued sales from the terminated rep's hard work is entitled to no presumption of such a limitation.

Summary

The contract Roger signed with BULL, back when lithium-ion batteries were all the rage, should be located and consulted at the first sign of trouble, not merely when termination is on the horizon. As the relationship is changing, maintaining a working knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of the manufacturer and the rep will greatly aid both parties. Furthermore, pushing back appropriately in the face of unreasonable demands may even enable the rep to limit or hold the line on drastic deviations from the parties' agreement. And if the termination is taken without due regard for the rep's efforts, then fair compensation may still be attainable on a post-termination basis. ■



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ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS INTEGRATION

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Recapping 2014 and looking ahead to 2015

Well, 2014 sure flew by, and here we are in Q1, 2015, starting the annual sales cycle all over. It is looking like the AV and security markets will continue to move in a positive direction regarding growth. There are still significant projects that will carry over from 2014 into 2015, so I am hopeful for a strong first quarter in 2015, which would be welcome after the first quarter of 2014.

Manufacturers are still adopting ethernet (TCP/IP) as the protocol of choice for the connectivity of remote AV devices and the integration of complex security systems. I am hearing more about 10 gigabit networks to support growth plans for customers. Higher resolution cameras and control systems are requiring more network bandwidth, driving these higher capacity networks.

Local connectivity via Bluetooth is trending in the AV space. The ease of connecting to a conferencing or presentation system is just around the corner, if not already here by the time this article is published. Streaming of audio and video over ethernet to supply content to personal remote devices will continue to drive higher demands on networks. Several of our factories have invested in "pre-sales technical salespeople" to work with integrators and end-users in support of the sales reps who support high level technical pre-sales designs.

In the conversations I have had with our manufacturers, they are all forecasting 10 to 30 percent growth in 2015. The increased hiring across all markets is very encouraging in supporting these sales goals. In reality, most companies downsized in the past few years, so the hiring of staff is just bringing them back up to the numbers of two years ago. I am still hearing there is a shortage of experienced technicians available. The industry needs to address this shortage. It is a double-edged sword. Companies are so busy they can't send techs to training classes, but this is also limiting the number of techs who can work on the more complicated projects. In some cases, training is being pushed to the manufacturers' rep function, where we are doing more consulting on projects than sales. While this is the level of involvement we need in order to drive the sales, we are not compensated for this additional time spent on design and project management.

In closing, we are all facing challenges. To overcome them, we must adapt and adjust.

INSTRUMENTATION, AUTOMATION & CONTROLS

Tom Diercksmeier, CPMR

A.G. Technologies, LLC
Scottsdale, Ariz.

This year should be time of growth

As 2014 wraps up, we are looking forward to a new year of growth for the instrumentation and controls market in 2015. Plant upgrades continue to fuel an increase in the oil and gas and power generation industries. Job growth and expansion continue in North Dakota and Texas, which also involve a vast amount of instrumentation and control equipment.

The aerospace and automotive markets are enjoying slight growth in usage, both in production and test areas, that should continue into the new year. Also, mineral mining in the coal, silver and copper industries is forecasted to increase slightly in 2015.

Newer and more cost effective sensor technologies are allowing customers to measure parameters that they have not been able to measure before. Light, moisture, current and power can now be measured more accurately and for a modest price.

Signal communication types are achieving higher speeds while maintaining accuracy. USB and Bluetooth-based sensors are on the increase in applications. These are particularly interesting when they are paired with an Android or IOS application for use in plant monitoring and facility maintenance. The growing market of application and wireless communication security software is enabling this technology to move forward.

2015 also looks promising for robotics and automation technology. Embedded controls will be key to each of these markets. Processing power and onboard memory capability continue to increase without impacting the cost to the manufacturer. This is coupled with new technologies in positioning sensors and actuators.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at 602-329-2147 or tom@agtechnologiesllc.com.

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When you read this, it will already be 2015. But as I'm writing, I am reflecting on the trip through 2014 and on what we accomplished, what we should have accomplished, and what we can do better in 2015.

Technology and everything around us is moving at such a rapid clip. It seems that, before we get comfortable with something, it's out of date. As an example, for the past several years we prided ourselves in having our own server that hosts all our data and website. It seemed like the right thing to do. One of the review items was, "Do we really want to spend the time, effort and resources to do this when an outside resource can do it better and cheaper?" — not to mention, probably more reliably. We will be migrating to the cloud which will be more efficient, and we'll have one less headache internally. That is a step in our ongoing efforts to remain, at least close to being able to perform efficiently in a very volatile marketplace.

I recently read a couple of articles that address the need to be a "futurist" in our thinking about not only where our industry is heading, but also where the world economy is going. One article was "Get a 20-Year Vision" by Mark Hoske, content manager of *Control Engineering Magazine*, and the other was "What Will the Plant of the Future Look Like?" by Marcelo Ferro, contributing writer for *Packaging Digest*. Both of these gentlemen presented some very thought-provoking insights into what they envision in both the short-term and long-term. (I guess what we used to consider long-term, three to five years down the road, is now maybe three to five months away.)

There is a constant demand for higher output and quality at a lower cost, with shorter development time to market, greater flexibility and customization, and "I want it tomorrow, or maybe later today." That will probably be reality in the not too distant future. In fact, a good part of that equation is in place now. As we see the growth of IT and software capability in manufacturing, we see the ability of the systems to diagnose problems and put fixes in place before there is a serious interruption in operation.

The growth of nanomanufacturing, to include 3D printing, will enhance these capabilities by providing replacement items to repair the defective ones by the time they fail. Nanomanufacturing may also be found in retail applications, providing instant availability of items without the inventory overhead and potential obsolescence of items.

How about this same capability in dealing with the human component? In the 20-year vision, let's imagine a monitoring system that will alert our medical professional about an impending problem and at the same time our nanomanufacturing equipment will be preparing the repair part. Seem far-fetched? So did landing a capsule on a small asteroid just a few years ago.

MATERIALS, ASSEMBLY, PRODUCTION & SUPPLY

Troy Gunnin

Sun Rep
Tampa, Fla.

What 'futurists' predict may not be so far away



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