

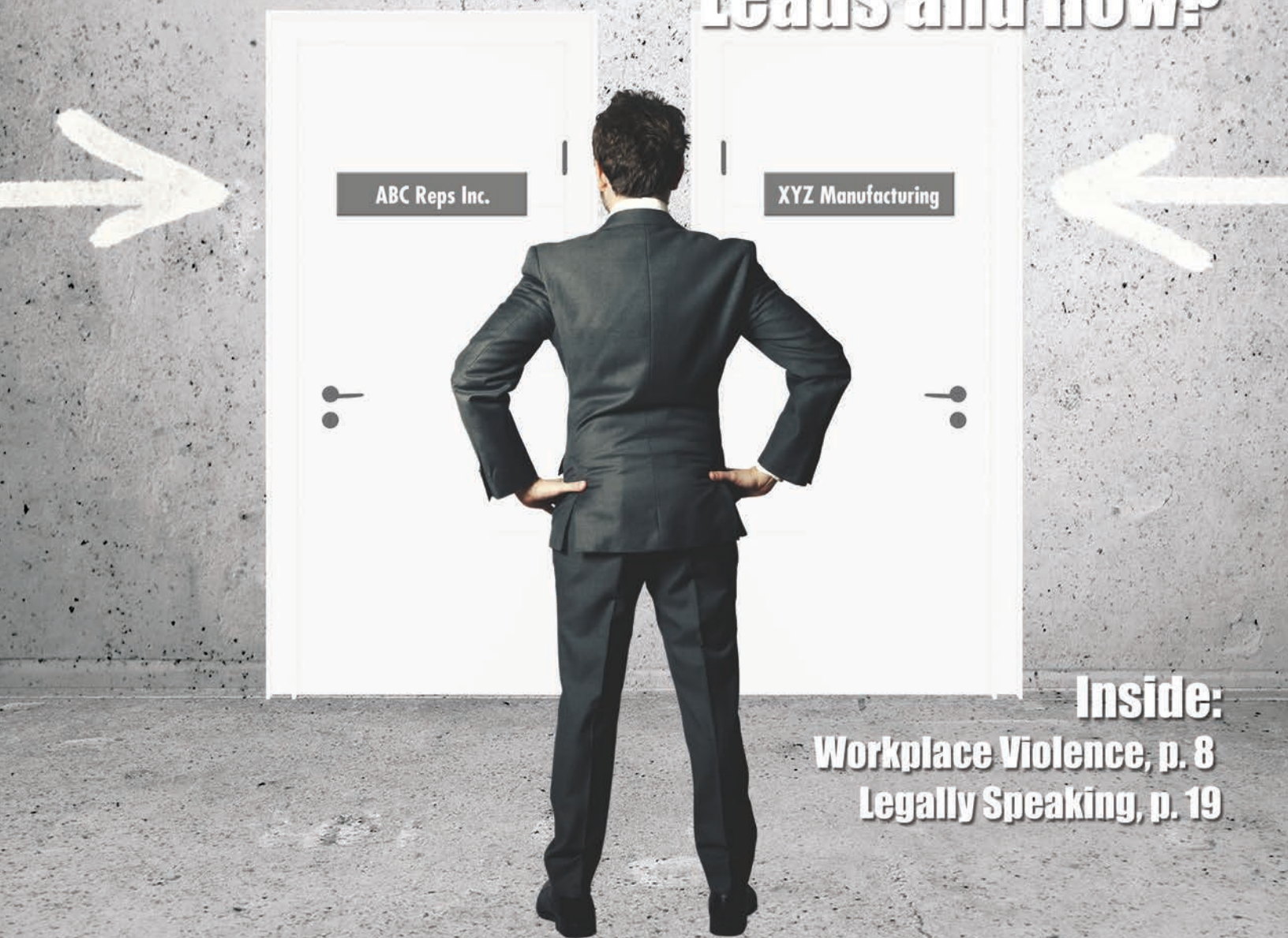
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THE VOICE OF MULTIPLE-LINE SELLING IN THE ELECTRONICS INDUSTRY



SUMMER 2019

Manufacturer or Rep: Who's Responsible for Generating Sales Leads and How?



Inside:
Workplace Violence, p. 8
Legally Speaking, p. 19

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Advancing and supporting the professional field sales function in the global electronics marketplace through programs and activities that educate, inform and advocate for manufacturers' representatives, distributors and their principals



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SUMMER 2019

Manufacturer or Rep:

**Who's Responsible
for Generating Sales
Leads and How?**



Working in the electronics industry, you've likely heard one of these statements:

Rep: "We are a sales company. We don't do marketing. That's up to the manufacturer."

Manufacturer: "I hire sales reps to go out and find new customers. We are just a manufacturer."

Here lies the great paradox of our industry: new sales are the lifeblood of a company, yet the responsibility for marketing and prospecting is tossed around like a game of hot potato.

Why do companies often shrug off sales accountability and actively stunt their own growth through muddled sales goals and processes? And how can a simple approach resolve the misalignment between reps and manufacturers and immediately begin creating new opportunities for both parties?

Read on!

Why is there disagreement between manufacturers and reps?

First the obvious answer: manufacturers and reps are two different organizations, each with their own processes and priorities. To complicate it even more, each manufacturer works with several reps and vice-versa, all unique from one another.

But this answer misses the fundamental cause: the hot-potato effect results from discomfort in not knowing how to generate real and well-qualified sales opportunities. By addressing this education gap, both manufacturers and reps can immediately begin generating measurable business growth.

Why does the electronics industry have trouble creating real sales opportunities?

A trip back through the history of marketing electronic components, devices and related services provides the answer. Just like many markets, the B2B electronics industry has traditionally been very new-product-oriented as companies maintain pace with rapidly evolving technologies. Thus, the tendency is to promote whatever is new. After all, new is interesting; companies survive on society wanting the latest car, phone, or television.

If you're reading this, I'm confident your

product is not an impulse buy. Few are waking up with the urge to buy an EMI filter just because it appeared in a commercial during the Super Bowl or it's now 25 percent off. Instead, your audience is reacting to need, and unless your new product announcement happens to coincide with the specific project that a potential client is working on (and in most cases, it won't), your press release or announcement is being read, mentally cataloged and likely forgotten.

Your potential customers — such as design engineers — are seeking education to help them design better products: content in the form of research, whitepapers, instructional videos, how-to's, and case studies. If you're not helping educate, you're not building the trust and awareness needed to convince an individual that your product is the solution.

Yet, even though this education is a critical component in the decision making process of a potential customer, many manufacturers perceive "content" as product data sheets and design files; great information to have when someone already understands what type of product is needed to address a challenge, but doesn't capture the engineer who recognizes there is a challenge but doesn't yet know the type of solution. And therein lies the rub!

What's the solution to aligning manufacturers and reps?

You guessed it: educational content. Rather than companies saying "Take a look at this new liquid cooling product

we just developed," they should be saying: "Here are the common challenges and solutions in data center thermal management. One such solution is liquid cooling, which is beneficial for these reasons. As shown in this case study, our liquid cooling solution has produced these amazing effects for customer X."

Who should be producing this content? The manufacturer (with some help from the rep on getting the word out).

NPIs, catalogs, brochures and data sheets are important, but not the final answer, rather manufacturers need articles, whitepapers,

(continued on next page)

Why do companies often shrug off sales accountability and actively stunt their own growth through muddled sales goals and processes? And how can a simple approach resolve the misalignment between reps and manufacturers and immediately begin creating new opportunities for both parties?

COVER STORY: Generating sales leads

(continued from previous page)



Graham Kilshaw
CEO

Lectrix (formerly ITEM Media)

Graham Kilshaw was born and educated in the U.K. He worked for Rupert Murdoch's tabloid newspaper group (News International) in the 90s, learning the hard knocks of a daily newspaper. From here, Kilshaw was hired by the Walt Disney Theme Park group, ultimately opening Disney's first ever French office in New York. After 20 years of running ITEM Media, he adapted to today's new marketplace by changing the publishing company into Lectrix — a full service marketing group for the electronics industry.

Kilshaw can be reached at graham@lectrixgroup.com.

interviews, videos, lists and blogs, and they need to ensure their future customers can easily find them.

"But Graham, this sounds like a lot of work."

Nope! In fact, it can be quite simple, and the little time invested now will save significant time in the future.

The following is for manufacturers to follow. If you're a rep reading this, forward it on to your principals to see how they can assist your sales efforts, and then continue reading to learn how you can play a part.

In summary, you will be sending emails to your contact list to offer them free content in return for submitting a registration form. In addition to the basics — name, company, email — the registration form will ask what the person intends to buy and when. Sometimes it's as simple as asking!

Here's the process:

1. If you do not already have an email or marketing automation platform, set up a simple account such as MailChimp (mailchimp.com), Constant Contact (constantcontact.com), or ActiveCampaign (activecampaign.com).
2. Compile your educational content: search your website, ask your engineering colleagues if they have content on their laptops, or search the office for printed content that can be digitized. If it is not already, upload the content to your website.
3. If you lack a web developer or designer, sign up for a landing page builder such as InstaPage (instapage.com), Unbounce (unbounce.com), or similar. If you happen to have a marketing automation platform, like Marketo (marketo.com) or HubSpot (hubspot.com), you may already have landing page functionality. If so, you won't need another landing page builder. The landing page is where you will use a registration form to capture data from your contacts, and most landing page platforms are designed to be easy to use, even for those not familiar with digital marketing or graphic design.
4. Build the landing page with a form embedded on it; when the form is submitted, it should redirect the user

to your piece of content (or be automatically delivered over email if you're comfortable with email automation). When you're setting up the form, ask your prospects if they intend to buy your company's type of product and when. The question can be simple: "Will you need to purchase a [Insert Product Type Here]?"

- A – Yes, in 0 to 6 months,
- B – Yes, in 7 to 12 months,
- C – Yes, in 13 to 24 months,
- D – No, not at this time."

Just ask them!

5. Prepare and send out an email announcing your free piece of content. Link the email's call to action — such as "Start Reading" or "Watch Now" — to your landing page. This will direct the recipients to the landing page so that you can capture the lead once the form is submitted.

This is where the manufacturer and rep can work together.

When the above process is complete, the manufacturer should create a LinkedIn post promoting the content and that directs viewers to the landing page. From here, every salesperson and support staff (such as technical support and application engineers) in the organization can share that post and landing page with one simple click of the "share" button on LinkedIn. Then, the reps can follow the same process, creating even more leads by sharing the content to their LinkedIn connections and territories, and even promoting the same content by email to their own contacts.

Between the combined email databases and LinkedIn networks of the manufacturers and reps, it's easy to see how this content can quickly and inexpensively gain quite the readership. And if someone takes the time to download the content, there's a high chance he's a potential customer.

If you follow this process, I'd love to hear about your experience; please email me at graham@lectrixgroup.com and let me know how it goes. We've found this process to be highly successful for ourselves and our clients as well.

Good luck!



Tobi J. Cornell, CPMR
VP Distribution - Outside Sales DFW
Kruvand Associates Inc.

With so many ERA members, it is not easy to get to know every rep, manufacturer and distributor 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 Tobi J. Cornell, CPMR, VP Distribution - Outside Sales DFW for Kruvand Associates Inc., headquartered in Dallas.

The Representor asked Tobi a few questions about her time in the electronics rep business and her experiences with ERA. Here is what she had to say.

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I graduated from Texas Christian University with a BBA in Marketing and started working for a manufacturers' rep firm in Texas, DJ Sales. I began my career in inside sales, then moved to outside sales after two and a half years. Kruvand Associates bought DJ Sales in 1999 and I've been with them ever since. It's been an amazing journey working for Kruvand these past 20 years and I've gotten to know so many wonderful people along the way.

On a personal note, I am married with two wonderful young boys and live in the Dallas area.

What are some things you enjoy outside of the workplace?

I love spending time with my family! During the school year we're quite busy with activities at school, as well as karate after school, and this new school year will bring more music into our household as our oldest son takes up the euphonium. Both my husband and I play instruments too. My husband plays the French Horn and I play the clarinet. I love to watch football, have a terrific love of books, for exercise I love to walk and go to Jazzercise, and as a family we all love books and movies of all types. I also enjoy going to see plays and musicals with my husband, or all four of us depending on what it is. We're also blessed to have a lot of family close by.

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

I've been in the rep business for 25 years and have been an ERA member for that entire time.

How did you become interested in being a rep in the electronics industry?

My father was in the rep industry, which is how I became aware that it even existed at all. He started out in distribution, then became a rep, and when he retired, I was just getting out of college, so I interviewed at a rep firm and rest is history. I have stayed in this industry because I love it!

What have you found to be most rewarding about the rep business?

There are a few things that I really love about the rep business. The first is the people. I have been so fortunate to meet the most amazing people. I feel as though we're all a giant family ... the reps, distributors and manufacturers ... the longer we're all in this business together, the closer we all get.

It's been the most rewarding factor to me. The second thing I love about this business is that it is different every single day. You will never get bored ... things evolve, change, technology and customers change ... there is something new to challenge you each and every day.

Briefly describe your rep firm.

Kruvand is a large rep firm covering the states of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana, and we also cover Mexico. We are approximately 35 employees and our lines are mostly electromechanical in nature.

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

Our best investments have been in our people. We've hired a new field salesperson in Dallas to cover an account base there, and another in Houston, who will cover accounts and assist in working closely with our channel partners in both Houston and Austin. We also are focusing on our social media presence as a company, and as individuals within our firm.

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?

I've met so many people through ERA and grown my relationships with those I already knew by being part of the organization. I have especially loved participating in the planning with the ERA Conference Committee several times in the past. Working on that has brought me so much insight into ERA and its commitment to its members and to this industry. I've really gained so much from being a part of that, as well as being a part of the Southwest Chapter of ERA and serving as its secretary.

Are you active on social media? Do you follow ERA? Have ERA updates via social media been helpful to you?

Yes, I am active on social media, and try to post something every day. I do follow ERA, and yes, the posts are very helpful!

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

In addition to playing the clarinet which a lot of people may not know, I also lived in Okinawa for a year when I was younger. I grew up with my mom and stepdad, and he was in the United States Marine Corps, which allowed us to be stationed in some pretty cool places!



Workplace Violence: It Would Never Happen Here

When the reporter announced the names and job titles of the victims at the Henry Pratt Company shooting, I prayed it was not one of my clients, association members, or an HR colleague. Then, my mind visualized the typical termination interview that plays out in American companies every day.

The plant manager recommends termination after a long series of attempts to solve a problem and return the employee to a positive relationship with the company. The HR manager prepares the termination documents and arranges the meeting. The intern serves as the witness to the termination. The plant manager presents the reasons for termination. The union representative is present because the contract states he can be present to represent his member. The employee arrives at the meeting aware termination is likely. He is ready with his weapon of choice hidden in his pocket and disaster looms. All the other wounded or killed are called “collateral damage.”

Is that what happened in Aurora, Ill.? We may never know the motivation, but if we can take away anything positive, we must learn from it and dispel any thought that “It would never happen here” because it can happen anywhere.

Every business owner or manager is subconsciously aware of the possibility that employee violence is possible. The probability moves to

the conscious mind during times of sudden, unpopular change, disciplinary interviews and termination. Vulnerability to employee violence is increased because employment relationships operate in an open environment.

Unlike institutional environments, such as prisons and mental health hospitals, where much of the activity is continuously restricted, employee environments are loosely controlled. Employees bring “personal baggage” to the workplace that pre-occupies their minds and creates additional stress.

The latest culprit, illegal drugs, radically changes the behavior of the otherwise, normal employee. Introducing drugs into the system has varying effects on people and on the same people at different times. It is a workplace dilemma with which we continually struggle.

Additionally, we recognize that human behavior is never 100 percent predictable, although we know more about it today than ever before. The dynamics of life and work create the need for management to always be sensitive to problem employees. There are many ways we can reduce the odds of becoming the victim of a potentially violent employee.

Selection procedures. Be certain there is a “keeper at the gate of employment.” Selection procedures, such as testing and reference checking, must not be overlooked or set aside in the

interest of the expedient hire or to save money. Making a quick decision, absent the safeguards that help weed out the troublemakers, increases the odds of getting an unstable employee.

Background check. Do you work with a violent ex-offender? You do not know if you do not check backgrounds. The single most reliable predictor of future behavior is what the employee has done in the past. Failure to check into the past of potential employees begs trouble. In addition, it is critical to match employees to jobs.

Job match. Placing an employee in a job for which he/she is not suited, by reason of skill or personality, can produce a "problem employee." A job mismatch increases the stress level of the employee. Poor performance fuels insecurity and coworkers can be cruel. Workplace bullies share the blame for many acts of violence.

Training. Train your key people, those in management and conflict resolution positions, in the skill of problem solving. Most supervisors have been promoted through the ranks and are excellent technicians or craftspeople. They have little or no training to handle difficult communication problems, yet they are expected to solve these kinds of problems on the firing line every day.

Conflict resolution. The well-meaning supervisor, who is untrained, can actually fuel the flames of violence, without an awareness of the potential harm. Supervisors who are skilled in conflict resolution techniques, the techniques for administering emotional first aid, are valuable resources to the organization. Research of incidents involving workplace killers illustrates how often poor management has contributed to violence in the workplace.

Policies and procedures. Uniformly enforce operating policies and procedures. If company-wide policies were created for the good of all, enforce them. When policies are haphazardly enforced, we run the risk of a breakdown in operating standards and morale. We run the risk of an employee feeling he/she is being singled out and treated unfairly.

Enforcing policies related to security can be difficult when employees are familiar with each other. We feel awkward requiring signatures, badges and package searches from people we know and work with daily. Awkwardness leads to laxity and laxity to vulnerability. In addition, when employees know policies are being enforced uniformly, they recognize how hard it is to circumvent them.

Sensitivity. Be especially sensitive at the time of employee discharge. Involuntary separation (discharge) is the capital punishment of employment. The action is emotionally charged and brings with it destruction of self-esteem, fear about economic survival, and feelings of being personally singled out for unfair treatment.

Here are some precautions you can take:

1. Use a system that lets you coach and counsel before you discharge. Coaching allows you to inform the employee that a problem exists and the behavior needs to change. Counseling allows you to tell the employee the coaching has not worked and it is now time to correct the behavior. During the counseling interview, it is important to say, "The problem has reached a time that it must be solved or we will not be able to keep you as our employee." If termination becomes necessary for an unsolved problem, send any potentially troubled employee

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Nancye M. Combs, AEP, SPHR

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FEATURE ARTICLE: Workplace violence

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home on “administrative leave pending a final decision.” If the final decision is termination, why bring that person back to your office? Notify the employee by mail. After all, the decision is final and exposure to potential violence is unnecessary.

2. For terminations at the company property, never handle this conversation in your office. You can be trapped! Handle it in a conference room or common area that will let you get away in the event of any disruption.

3. If you are concerned about the behavior or intentions of any disruptive person, notify your local police department. Do not ask them to help you terminate the person. Ask them to sit in your parking lot or in your lobby. While helping the management at a nursing home, I watched how the behavior of a loud, abusive, angry, employee evaporated when she learned the police officer in the lobby was there in case he was needed.

4. Let employees know about any potentially disruptive person and tell them to call 911 instantly without any approval if they feel in danger, or receive/hear any threats.

No-fault concept. Consider “no-fault termination” of employment whenever possible. Generally, the no-fault concept is associated with divorce. It reduces some of the emotional charge at a stressful time. Whenever possible, end the employment relationship without a “bad guy.” Accept that anyone can wind-up in the wrong job, the wrong company, or the wrong occupation. Successful separation, with the dignity of the employee intact, is the goal of the effective and wise manager.

There are three goals of any employee discharge:

1. The employee goes away peacefully with his/her dignity intact.
2. No one is injured or killed.
3. The company does not get sued.

These things will not guarantee that you will never be the subject of employee violence, but it is the kind of preventive medicine that contributes to a healthy working environment. ■

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2019 reflections: 'Ready, fire, aim'

Wow! Where has 2019 gone? Here we are HALF WAY through what was the New Year just a minute ago! Has EDS really come and gone? Did you go? Did you follow up on all of those action items — call or email the many new folks you met? It is never too late. It is also never too late to send a thank you email for a new lead, lunch or dinner, or just the opportunity to meet with him/her and pursue new opportunities together.

Do not be too tough on yourself if your calendar got away from you. It just means that you are busy, but "Carpe Diem" is the order of the day now. The year always starts off with lots of new plans, goals and initiatives — new markets to go after; new folks to find, hire and train — hoping that they bring in lots of new opportunities for your company in the New Year. We have all been brainwashed to think that NEW is always BETTER. The NEW model of car is most certainly better than last year's model; the "new and improved" consumer product must be better ... Manufacturers spend millions of dollars on developing new product introductions (NPI) that now become the NEW focused products that they want their reps and distributors to get designed-in, push the NEW stuff and hope the legacy stuff sells itself.

How is all of that working out so far? The mid-year point is upon us. It is time to pause and take a look to see how all of our NEW plans are taking shape. Are the new folks doing what we want/trained them for? Are our new products resonating with our new/existing customer base? Are we making our plan for the New Year that is now getting older each day?

There is a school of management that involves "ready, fire, aim" — ready (plan), fire (implement the plan and check on the results), aim (recalibrate and fire again). Some companies may be known for "ready, aim, aim." They may never fire for fear of missing the target, for seeing their NPI initiatives not accepted by the customers. The fear of failure paralyzes the company. They continue to rely on their tried and true products — their legacy products — to sustain them; sort of like that famous sales example of the buggy whip manufacturer.

Do you know any companies like this? Of course you do!

We then have the "fire, fire, fire" companies. They hit a lot of targets but cause a lot

of collateral damage while doing it, causing damage to their customers who cannot rely on them for consistency and conformity. They are quick to "end-of-life" (EOL) products. They cause damage to their own image as a disruptor to the market with tons of new stuff that never sticks around long enough to see if its introduction was a good or bad idea. You will never fail in your 90-day plan if you keep changing it every 60 days!

What are YOU doing at this mid-year point to evaluate your own company's NEW plans for 2019? Do you ever change your plans, or do you leave them in place for fear that YOU may look bad if you admit that your plans were a bit flawed? Do you take sales budgets up or down for 2H 2019, or do you leave them in place knowing that you and your sales force have NO CHANCE of making budgets for 2019, jeopardizing incentive plans for 2019?

What about your non-sales goals — professional development, training, CRM training, new website launch, etc.? Do you shelve the investments planned for 2H 2019 because you will miss your plan? Many of these original investments may be just the thing you CANNOT afford to cut when the market gets soft!

Resetting goals is a tricky thing to do. We think about why we did not see the softer market coming ... Were we too optimistic? Were our customers overconfident? Did the past two-plus years of a strong market lull us into complacency?

The best source of data to help you in your 2H planning process is the CUSTOMER!

Go, talk to them! What are THEY seeing? Talk to the marketing and sales force of your customers. What do THEY see? They are a great resource of information and market G-2 that most of us never talk to (or even know who they are).

Your companies are relying on YOU to guide them for 2H 2019. Which category are you in?

- Folks who MAKE IT HAPPEN?
- Folks who WATCH IT HAPPEN?
- Folks who WONDER WHAT HAPPENED?

I know what category ALL of us see OURSELVES in ... do others?

Let's go MAKE IT HAPPEN for 2H 2019!



by **Walter E. Tobin**
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Insights and observations from EDS

Did you know that it is against the rules at the Mirage to take pictures of the roulette table while you have a bet placed? Neither did I. But apparently, everybody else at the table did! I guess they're serious about this "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" thing.

With apologies to whomever it was that coined that phrase though, it seems appropriate to start this quarter's column with some observations (beyond my travails at the casino) from a busy week at the EDS Summit.

For my part, I left for Las Vegas with a number of expectations; and the week did not disappoint. The EDS website tells us that, "The core of EDS is valuable idea exchange!" I couldn't agree more. The 30-plus formal and informal meetings I participated in with manufacturers, distributors, other reps and service providers were informative, thought provoking and stimulating — which also describes the annual breakfast presentations that I attended courtesy of TTI and Digi-Key. While it occurs to me that the two breakfasts were very different in approach, both included valuable content and takeaways.

Throughout my week in Vegas, I learned about new technologies, discussed new and updated business plans; and renewed many existing relationships, as well as starting new ones. My compliments to ECIA and ERA for their collaboration in creating EDS and evolving this forum in a dynamic and changing industry environment.

In my humble opinion, the show continues to be a worthy investment in time and energy. Speaking of worthy investments, a special shout out to Mouser and Digi-Key (along with their sponsors — Panasonic, Kemet, Molex, TDK, Littelfuse and Murata) who "collaborated" so well in raising \$20,000 for "Hiring our Heroes!" @#EDSFeud.

To wrap up regarding my comments on EDS, I confess that I proved to be about 50/50 on forecasting in last quarter's column. Among my predictions were that the weather would be gorgeous (a thunder and lightning storm delayed my return flight by several hours #ReallyRedEyes); and that the odds were against winning at the casino (nailed that one, despite my will to win!). You may also recall that I predicted the elevators would (probably not) be easy to navigate.

Well, I will leave it to you to reflect upon your individual elevator experiences, but it occurs to me that when elevators are functioning correctly, they go up and down in a controlled fashion. However, no matter which way they go, learning to navigate them is the key. This seems especially relevant at this time since everything I am hearing, reading and experiencing tells me that our market has made a rather abrupt turn in direction from just a few short weeks

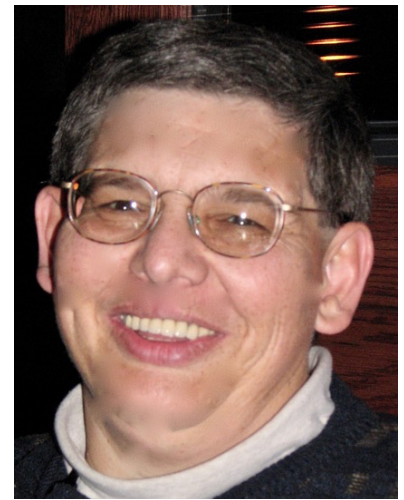
ago when we were all in Las Vegas celebrating a rather robust 2018; and we will need all our navigating skills going forward.

There are many others who are much better at prognostication than me, so I will leave comments regarding the apparent change in market direction to them. I will, however, report that the staff and XCOM of ERA are taking a lesson from Chris Beeson's (Digi-Key Electronics) EDS presentation in "rolling up our sleeves" to put specific plans and activities in place to move the association forward with a constant set of goals and objectives; regardless of the market direction.

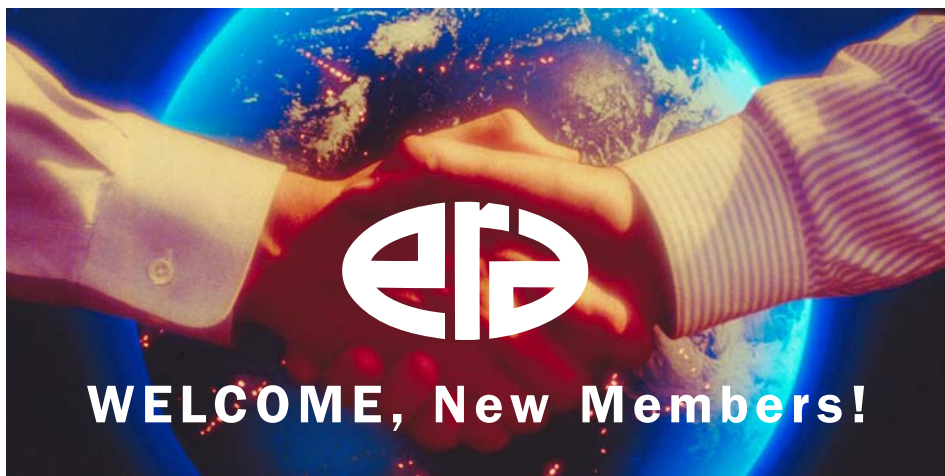
Speaking of Chris Beeson, I'd like to publicly thank him for his many contributions to ERA and specifically the XCOM. As has been announced elsewhere, Chris will be

(continued on page 26)

*My compliments to
ECIA and ERA for their
collaboration in creating
EDS and evolving this
forum in a dynamic
and changing industry
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by **Chuck Tanzola, CPMR**
The Fusion Sourcing Group Inc.
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These companies joined ERA since March 2019.

(The ERA chapter of each rep firm is listed in *italics* after the company name.)

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We did it again!

All of us at *The Representor* wonder if we could find ERA's early cornerstones that helped lay the foundation for our proud association. Well, we did!

This issue features two of our cherished Hall of Famers: Bernard C. Newman, Jr. and Joel Schwartz.

Before you even start reading this WATN (Where Are They Now?) column I feel compelled to share the enthusiasm and energy these two gentlemen radiated. Bernie came across as sharp and energetic just as he did when he carried the proverbial salesman's bag, and indeed, he was an exceptional salesman. He probably still is!

When I called Joel, I asked his secretary for his cell phone number. She responded, "You just missed him!" Yes, he is still active at 79 years young! I humbly thought that all reps at that age were retired enjoying the fruits of their labors, but au contraire, Joel is still at it because he loves it.

Read on to see why these two guys are phenomenal.

— Harry J. Abramson

Where is Bernard C. Newman, Jr. now ...



Nancy and Bernard C. Newman, Jr.

My involvement with ERA began in 1956 when I was hired by the F. A. Daugherty Co., a Buckeye Chapter member, to cover western Pennsylvania and West Virginia. In 1960, I left to establish the Newman Sales Company, subsequently joining with a half-dozen other Pittsburgh-based reps to form the Keystone Mountain Chapter of ERA. Following several terms as Chapter Delegate, I was elected to serve on ERA's Executive Committee (XCOM) as the association's Treasurer. After four years on the XCOM, the last two as senior VP of Activities, I was appointed to the ERA Insurance Trust Board of Trustees, a position I held until becoming ERA's Chairman of the Board in 1989.

Retirement in 1991 opened the door to a wide range of volunteer opportunities, and at

some point in the past 28 years, I have taken advantage of quite a few, including a counselor at a crisis intervention center; taught students pursuing a GED; a reader to the visually impaired; a participant in a medical mission to Guatemala; tutored in our local literacy program; and even served as a tour guide on a WWII submarine! Quite a variety, but each rewarding in its own special way.

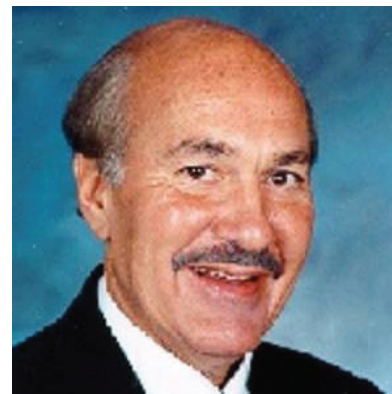
None of this journey would have been possible without the love and support of my wife, Nancy. Our marriage of 68 years has produced three daughters, five grandchildren, and so far, seven great-grandchildren. Unfortunately, we're the only ones left in Pittsburgh, but travelling to places in California and Florida to see them is always great fun, and something we try to do as often as possible.

I have always been proud of my profession and to have been an ERA rep. In April 1991, at the association's biannual conference in New Orleans, I was inducted into ERA's Hall of Fame as its 17th member. To be so honored by one's peers is as humbling as it is gratifying.

ERA enjoys a prominent presence in today's electronics industry. As every old-timer well knows, such was not always the case! Sustaining the existing level of influence will be an ongoing challenge. I am confident that ERA's members, and their leaders, are equal to the task.

Where is Joel Schwartz now ...

As a manufacturers' representative since 1965, I'm still proud to be an active owner and President



by Harry J. Abramson

Founder (Retired)
Electronic Salesmasters Inc.

Harry Abramson founded Electronic Salesmasters Inc. in 1972. He established industry notoriety by virtue of his firm's peak performance, hundreds of articles and speaking appearances at ERA's national conferences and chapter meetings and sister trade association MANA. He has an electrical engineering degree from Temple University and entered the electronics industry as an engineer at RCA in Camden, N.J.

His ERA involvement includes serving as vice president of the Components Group and president of the Ohio Chapter. Under his leadership, the chapter was awarded the National Chapter of the Year Award. Abramson recently was recognized with ERA's prestigious Life Membership Award.

You can reach Harry J. Abramson at 216-406-4119 or email him at hja725@yahoo.com.

(continued on page 22)



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Empowered sales rep protects his contract rights; delivers strong jolt to breaching principal

William Valle's commission lawsuit against Powertech Industrial Co. Ltd. offers a little bit of everything.

Two versions of a contract, changing commission rates, enforceability questions, and the duty of good faith and fair dealing are all raised in this dispute. (So too is the perennial employee v. independent contractor battle, but that part of their contest will be saved for another day.)

The case recently went to trial before the Hon. Diane J. Casper, who years ago demonstrated her mettle while presiding over the criminal trial of Boston mobster and FBI "most wanted" list mainstay James "Whitey" Bulger.

The beginning

A sales rep out of Massachusetts, Valle, signed his first rep contract with Powertech, a Taiwanese manufacturer of "power solutions," including surge protectors and uninterruptible power supplies, in 2002, and represented the company into 2017.

He developed a relationship for Powertech with customer American Power Conversion (APC) and was to receive a 5 percent commission on all sales to APC. Valle also reeled in other customers, including Para Systems. Powertech and Valle entered into a separate contract for Para, which also called for payment of a 5 percent commission, and orally agreed on commission rates for other customers.

At Powertech's request, the parties agreed to modify their agreement in 2008 to lower Valle's commission rate on APC sales to 3½ percent, and to even lower rates for the sale of certain products.

The operative 2009 rep contract

In 2009, Powertech again sought to change the contract terms, this time to implement a standard commission rate. Valle's counter sought to preserve his original APC deal. The compromise that emerged was a new agreement providing that upon termination, Valle would receive commissions on all APC orders for two years.

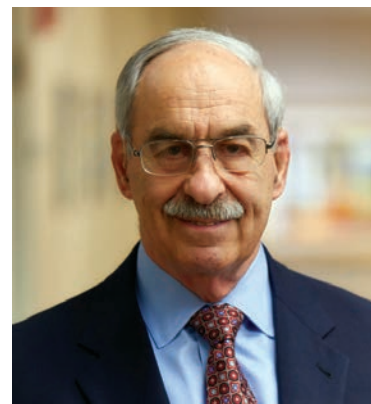
Valle then sought to include commission rates for all his customers in the new agreement, but Powertech resisted, claiming that was too "complicated." Instead, the parties' 2009 contract merely stated that Powertech would provide Valle "a commission of the parties' mutual agreed percentage in writing for the payment" from specified customers and enabled the parties to add other customers later.

Such unclear, mealy-mouthed language in an agreement often leads to trouble, and this case proved no exception. While the 2009 rep contract expressly stated that it "supersedes all prior agreements" between the parties, this vague term led Valle to believe that all existing commission rates would remain the same unless otherwise agreed. Adding to the confusion, he testified in his deposition that he knew the 2009 contract replaced the earlier 2002 version and admitted the 2002 deal was no longer effective.

In keeping with the spirit of the 2009 contract, the parties were able to agree on commissions through 2016. Powertech frequently sought to renegotiate Valle's commission rates,

(continued on page 25)

Basic contract law requires the parties to agree on the material terms. Not all terms must be spelled out, but the essential terms must be sufficiently definite to make the parties' obligations ascertainable.



by Gerald M. Newman
ERA General Counsel

Gerald M. Newman and Adam J. Glazer are partners in the law firm of Schoenberg Finkel Newman & Rosenberg LLC, and they serve as general counsel to ERA. They are also regular contributors to The Representor, and participate in Expert Access, the program that offers telephone consultations to ERA members.

You can call Gerry Newman or Adam Glazer at 312-648-2300 or send email to gerald.newman@snfr.com or adam.glazer@snfr.com.



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UPRIGHT is a New York City-based team that supports businesses through web design, development, branding, content strategy, and corporate innovation. With diverse backgrounds in the startup tech community, Upright provides resources for companies to expand their growth through technology. Upright is familiar with the manufacturers' rep model and its interaction with their manufacturers and distribution partners. For more information, go to upright.nyc.

TSJM GROUP offers successful client and candidate placements within sales, engineering, quality and executive leadership, both in North America and internationally. Call 603-560-1673 or email slcolantuone@tsjmgroupp.com for more information.

ALL ERA TELEFORUM AUDIO FILES covering 30+ educational topics for reps, manufacturers and distributors, are now available at no charge to members. To review the teleforum library and download files, go to era.org.

UPS is an ERA member service provider for shipping of all kinds. For discounts of up to 34 percent, call 800-MEMBERS (636-2377).

*For a complete list of ERA's Recognized Resources, check out the Member Services page at era.org. Then link to a service provider's home page for more information. Or take advantage of services from companies like **Avis** and **Hertz Car Rentals** (which are accessible ONLY via the ERA website).*

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?: Bernard C. Newman & Joel Schwartz

(continued from page 17)



Joel Schwartz

of LCA Sales Company. My wife, Ellen, and I acquired LCA in 1979. Covering New York through Virginia, LCA has sold components, consumer products, sound, signal, A/V and security products with primary focus on security products since the late 90s. LCA has been very fortunate to have extremely knowledgeable, experienced, long-term and loyal employees.

I was born in the Bronx and moved to Yonkers, N.Y., when I was five. I met Ellen when she was 12 and I was 15. We both attended Roosevelt High School. I received my BSEE from Stevens Institute of Technology in 1962. By attending classes after work, I earned my MBA from Fairleigh Dickinson University Business School in 1966 with a double major in Finance and Marketing. My master's thesis included detailed surveys of how manufacturers' representatives can obtain new lines and help find principals good reps. These surveys were subsequently included in three articles that I wrote for *The Representer* in 1967.

Upon graduation from Stevens, I began a career with General Precision, designing and testing inertial guidance systems for Mobile Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MMRBM) and AJN8 Fighter Planes. This was during the Vietnam War and Cuban Missile Crisis, and I was granted a critical skills deferment and secret security clearance.

Ellen and I were married in 1963 and moved to Little Falls, N.J. In 1965, I was offered the opportunity by Ellen's father, Paul Nichols, a founding partner at LCA, to work as a sales engineer for the company. This allowed us to return to our native New York and start our family shortly thereafter.

I became active in ERA's Metro New York Chapter, and in 1979, became a Chapter VP. In 1980, I became ERA's National VP of the Sound, Signal and Security Division. I attended ERA conferences and XCOM meetings every year, and received ERA's White Pin Award in 1984. In 1985, I became ERA's Senior VP.

Over the next few years, I also served on the Board of the National Sound and Communications Association (NSCA) as its Show Committee and Membership Chairman. In 1985-1986, I served as a Director of the Electronics Industry Show Corp. and the Electronics Distribution Show (EDS), and worked to expand MRERE. Rep membership, benefits and participation were always the goal.

In 1987-88, I was appointed ERA National's VP, Fiscal & Legal, and became President in 1989-90, then Chairman of the Board from 1991-92. Subsequently, I served as Chairman of the ERA Insurance Trust from 1991-92 and helped get ERA's first Long-Term Care Policy approved.

In my various positions within ERA, Ray Hall was always a good friend and driving force, accelerating my learning curves and productivity. Karin Derkacz, Tom Shanahan, Tess Hill and Janet Hipp were wonderful staff members I could always count on to get the job done right!

Mentors were instrumental in my progress. ERA Legal Consultants, David Fisher and Gerry Newman, were invaluable friends in so many ways. Tim Coakley and Jess Spoons were always available for top notch professional guidance. Bruce Anderson and David Locke were also very helpful.

My 1994 ERA Hall of Fame Award, presented at PGA National Resort, in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., was truly the highlight of my business career. Shortly after, Ellen and I purchased an on site condominium and golf membership there, which we still own and use for winter vacations. Over the years, we've had some great times during remote ERA XCOM and BOD meetings with Ray and Pat Hall, Dave and Nona McCoy, and others.

Another accomplishment I am proud of was helping create a peer group of rep friends that met periodically in remote locations to brainstorm, discuss creative business ideas and help solve each other's problems.

In 1967, at LCA, I had the idea and opportunity to create a small cable assembly manufacturing and distribution company that provided unique cables, connectors and assemblies to local dealers. Bi-Tronics (now BTX Technologies) was formed and sold to our son, Gregory, in 2003. An engineer with an MBA degree, he has built it into a prominent company, selling a broad spectrum of professional A/V products internationally. Even better, we're located in the same building and get to have lunch together when we're both free.

Back in 2015, Ted Curtin and I decided to try to convince the Security Industry Association (SIA) to accept manufacturers' reps as associate members. We worked hard to make it happen, and finally succeeded in 2017. It was very gratifying to both of us, and we each received their Volunteer of the Year Award in 2018.

After 56 years (and counting) of a happy marriage with our two children and five grown grandchildren, I'm enjoying any free time we can have together. Ellen is retired, but works harder than any chef, gardener and carpenter, combined, that I've ever seen. My favorite pastime for decades has been golf. As an engineer, I'm always experimenting with new swings, unique clubs and training aids. While I was once a 9 handicap, today I play for the pure enjoyment of the game. We also use our timeshare, periodically, in Las Vegas, Newport, R.I., or Catskill Mountain resorts.

ERA has made a huge difference in my life and career. Thanks to everyone who helped and befriended me along the way! ■

The latest on tax developments

A number of state legislatures reacted to the passage of the 2017 tax law changes aimed at limiting the total tax deductions on form 1040 schedule A to \$10,000. Taxes limited in this manner referred to the combined total of state income taxes, property taxes and real estate taxes. The most aggrieved states were the ones with high taxation — New York, California, New Jersey and Illinois. Some of these states had a bright idea — create a charitable trust to which citizens could “voluntarily” contribute; the state would issue a credit against the taxes owed. Of course, if the taxpayer did not contribute, the state would come after him or her for the taxes due. So, while “voluntary,” taxpayers would be betting their house or other assets on it.

Betting against your own house is probably not a good idea. States thought that cash contributions would have been deductible up to 60 percent of adjusted gross income without limit; problem solved. Of course, the IRS didn't think so. The IRS immediately replied that this would not work.

That language has just been added to the tax law. In effect, the state credit offsets the charitable contribution rather than the state tax, leaving the state tax as the deduction limited to \$10,000. The new law carves out an exception. If the state credit is 15 percent or less of the charitable “donation,” the taxpayer can have his charitable deduction. It appears that this exception was aimed at protecting easements or gifts of land for parks or historic buildings.

The new law creates a new Independent Appeals Office which is supposed to avoid litigation if possible by being an independent arbiter between the IRS and the taxpayer. This sounds a lot like the IRS appeals process at an earlier point in the process. Time will tell.

The IRS will be allowed to take credit card payments in the near future. The stipulation: the taxpayer pays all fees for the transaction.

The other “big” item in the new law is a new form of Health Reimbursement Account

(HRA) which was created for small companies. In addition to any regular insurance program an employer may have, individual employees will be able to buy their own medical insurance and be reimbursed by their employer. As usual with company medical plans, the reimbursements will not be taxable to the employee, but will be deductible to the employer.

The employer can name a maximum

amount it will pay. The employee can obtain any form of insurance —

Obamacare, a regular medical insurance company, and, if eligible, Medicare. The employee must stay insured and cannot spend the allowance on supplemental insurance such as vision or dental care. If the employer reimbursement is not enough to cover the policy, the company can include a new area in its cafeteria plan to permit the employee to contribute to the plan to cover the dif-

ference in premium.

Of course, if the employee is receiving reimbursements from Obamacare, double-dipping will not be allowed. This is a plan; it has to be offered to all employees who fit the “class.” The employer's contribution can be greater for some employees than others for a legitimate reason, such as age, disability or family size. It will be interesting to see the IRS regulations; they could be complex.

Along with the above insurance plan, the new law also will allow employers to reimburse employees up to \$1,800 per year to cover actual medical expenses not otherwise reimbursed. It is called an Excepted Benefit HRA plan. An employee can be in this plan even if he has no other insurance.

Finally, the law created a requirement that the IRS notify a taxpayer if there is suspected unauthorized use of the taxpayer's identity, and they are to notify the taxpayer if someone was charged with the crime. Further, an IRS agent will be assigned to a case of identity theft and will be the point person with the taxpayer until conclusion of the case.



by Stanton B. Herzog, CPA
ERA Tax, Audit & Accounting Consultant

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.

ERA ANNOUNCES 2020 CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

ERA has announced the appointment of the chair, vice chair and members of the committee tasked with the development of its 2020 Conference, scheduled Feb. 23-25, at the AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center in Austin, Texas.

The chair of the committee is Mike Swenson, CPMR, of Mel Foster Company and the vice chair is Craig Anderson, CPMR, of Sumer Inc. Swenson is a returning committee member.

"It is an honor to chair the upcoming 2020 ERA Conference," Swenson said. "This do-not-miss event brings together manufacturers' representatives, distributors and manufacturers, and offers everyone a truly unique opportunity to learn, collaborate and network. I am confident that with the help of my fellow planning committee members we will deliver another outstanding conference program in 2020."

In addition to Swenson, other returning members of the ERA 2020 Conference Committee are: Amy Hain of RFMW; Joe Braun, CPMR, of EK Micro; John Hutson, CPMR, of The MacInnis Group; John O'Brien, CPMR, of Coakley Boyd & Abbett; Kingsland Coombs, CPMR, CSP, of Control Sales; and Holly Myers, CPMR, of Genie Group.

New members of the committee are: Greg Pace of Ohmite Manufacturing; Mark Conley of O'Donnell Associates North Inc.; Michael Knight of TTI Inc.; Gordon Hunter of Littelfuse; Todd McAtee of Mouser; Steve Cholas of Big Zeta; and Tom Griffin, CPMR, of Catalyst Sales and ERA Sr. VP/Education.

Braun and Knight will serve as co-chairs of the Keynote Committee; Conley and McAtee will serve as co-chairs of the General Sessions Committee; Coombs and Hain will serve as co-chairs of the Break-out Sessions Committee; O'Brien and Pace will serve as co-chairs of the Sponsorship Committee; and Cholas, Hunter, Hutson and Myers will serve as conference advisors.

ERA staff members on the committee are: ERA CEO Walter E. Tobin, Erin Collins, conference coordinator; and Neda Simeonova, communications director.

ERA INTRODUCES NEW RECOGNIZED RESOURCES SERVICE PROVIDER

ERA has added a new service provider, Upright, to its Recognized Resources. Upright is a New York City-based team that supports businesses through web design, development, branding, content strategy and corporate innovations. With diverse backgrounds in the startup tech community, the company provides resources for companies to expand their growth through technology. Upright is familiar with the manufacturer's rep model and its interaction with their manufacturers and distribution partners.

"Our efforts are led by thoughtfulness and diligence and we place a strong emphasis on meeting the client's needs," said Emma Gaedeke, co-founder and lead content strategist of Upright. "We are passionate about helping businesses embrace tech innovation through a powerful digital presence, have a strong understanding of the manufacturer rep model and are excited to assist the members of the ERA."

CONFERENCE SPONSORSHIPS OPPORTUNITIES ARE NOW OPEN

Sponsorship opportunities are now open for the 2020 ERA Conference, scheduled Feb. 23-25 at the AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center in Austin, Texas.

Conference sponsors will have the opportunity to support the conference vital educational programming and networking opportunities, and foster innovation and growth in the industry through increased collaboration among reps, manufacturers and distributors.

This year, sponsors can choose from various sponsorship options, most of which include one or more complimentary registrations for the event. For more details or to register, visit <https://era.org/era-events/era-conference-sponsors>.

SIGNS POINT TO U.S. RECESSION

NPR recently reported that signs are pointing to a coming U.S. recession, according to an economic indicator that has preceded every recession over the past five decades. It is known among economists and Wall Street traders as a "yield curve inversion," and it refers to when long-term interest rates are paying out less than short-term rates. That curve has been flattening out and sloping down for more than a year, raising worries among some analysts that investors' long-term view of the market is not positive and that an economic downturn is looming.

IN MEMORIAM OF CHARLES 'CHUCK' MATHIAS

ERA mourns the loss of Charles "Chuck" Henry Mathias, president of Mathias Associates Inc. in Longwood, Fla. Mathias passed away on June 19, 2019. He was 84.

Mathias served as president and delegate for the Florida-Sunshine Chapter of ERA. He also served as treasurer, and after he retired, he continued to serve the chapter in that capacity until 2018. Mathias also was a 1995 recipient of the Jess Spoons – ERA White Pin Scholarship Award.

He is survived by his wife Alice Louise Newbolt, his two children, Melonie Louise Hall and Corey Hahn Mathias, and his granddaughter, Deanna Louise Hall.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Wekiva Presbyterian Church Chancel Choir.

LEGALLY SPEAKING: Empowered sales rep

(continued from page 19)

and the parties generally found agreement, which Powertech reflected on commission spreadsheets. Sometimes, however, Powertech did not discuss a commission change with Valle, but just showed it on the invoice he would receive.

Valle would regularly sign these invoices and send them back, which Powertech construed as his assent to the changes, but he denied signaling agreement with a changed commission by signing. He understood that Powertech would only wire his commission payments upon receipt of a signed invoice.

The underlying conduct

According to Valle, Powertech began unilaterally changing commission rates in 2015 whenever it determined the profit on a particular product was not enough. He argued this violated the 2009 agreement's language requiring Powertech to provide "a commission of the parties' mutual agreed percentage in writing for the payment" because he did not agree to the changed rates.

In support, he relied upon a spreadsheet showing changes made by Powertech in 2015 and 2016 to earlier commission rates with his consent. Valle insisted that no other "writing" shows the parties' agreement to lower commission rates.

This highlights the crux of the commission dispute. Valle maintains that unless the rates in effect before the 2009 contract were renegotiated, they remained the same. He pointed to the 5 percent commissions on Para, which remained the same after the 2009 contract took effect, and to two documents showing that APC commissions remained at 3½ percent after 2009.

Powertech, in contrast, argued the absence of a commissions schedule in the 2009 agreement demonstrated how the parties reached no agreement on commission rates, and therefore contended that agreement was invalid and unenforceable on the grounds it lacked such a material term.

Powertech stopped paying commissions altogether at the end of 2016, ignoring the two-year post-termination payment provision. In February 2017, Valle sued in Boston federal court, including for breach of the 2009 contract, and for breaching the duty of good faith and fair dealing.

Four days later, Powertech terminated the 2009 agreement, and continued to withhold commissions. Meanwhile, its sales to APC remained brisk.

Both parties sought to avoid a trial by filing motions for summary judgment, asking the court to rule in their favor without the need to empanel a jury and hear evidence.

The alleged breach of contract

Basic contract law requires the parties to agree on the material terms. Not all terms must be spelled out, but the essential terms must be sufficiently definite to make the parties' obligations ascertainable.

Powertech invoked this principle to contend the 2009 agreement was not enforceable because the material term of a set commission rate was lacking. It cited Massachusetts law recognizing that "an agreement to enter into a contract which leaves the terms of that contract for future negotiation is too indefinite to be enforced."

However, Judge Casper was having none of it. She ruled that the 2009 contract, signed by both parties, expressly reflected their intent to be bound by it, and the document "incorporated the Powertech spreadsheets memorializing Valle's commission rates, which existed prior to 2009 Agreement."

By plainly referencing that Powertech would provide Valle with a separate document "in writing" that set out the commission rates, and contemplating it would change over time, Judge Casper determined the 2009 contract contained the necessary material terms. Even had the contract not incorporated the spreadsheets, the court found it would still prove enforceable based on the course of dealings between the parties, which had both parties relying on the spreadsheets' commission rates for years.

After finding the 2009 agreement constituted a valid contract, the court reached the easy conclusion that Powertech had violated it by failing to pay commissions on sales to APC for the two-year post-termination period. Summary judgment in Valle's favor was entered accordingly.

As to the claim that Powertech further breached by unilaterally changing the commission rates during the contract, Judge Casper found this was an issue for trial. Both parties' arguments were reasonably plausible, and the jury would have to decide whether Powertech breached by changing the commission rates without Valle's written approval, or whether the evidence showed Valle

(continued on next page)

FROM THE TOP: EDS observations

(continued from page 15)

transitioning off of the XCOM as the Distributor Delegate.

Chris, your insights have been invaluable, your counsel appreciated and your friendship is treasured. Thank you.

At the same time, I would like to welcome Craig Sanderson of Sager Electronics to the ERA XCOM. I believe that I speak for the XCOM, BOD and entire rep community in stating that we are fortunate to have another such universally respected member of the distribution community join the ERA XCOM. Craig, I look forward to your inputs and working with you.

I leave you with this. For everything there is a season — “Shows” evolve to “Summits.” Markets go up, markets go down. People’s roles and positions change. Sometimes the wheel comes up red and sometimes it comes up black (and sometimes neither). However, the season for valuable exchange of ideas never ends.

As always, I can be reached at ctanzola@fusionsourcing.com and welcome your comments and feedback. If you attended the EDS Summit, I would love to hear your valuable insights. May all your navigation be smooth! ■

LEGALLY SPEAKING: Empowered sales rep

(continued from previous page)

consented to those changes by signing and returning the invoices without challenging the amounts.

The alleged breach of the good faith duty

Massachusetts, like most states, reads into every contract an implied duty of good faith and fair dealing between the contracting parties. When entering into a contract, a party cannot act to interfere with “the right of the other party to receive the fruits of the contract.”

Valle alleged that Powertech’s failing to pay the commissions due, failing to negotiate the commission rates in good faith, and unilateral changes to the commission rates without his knowledge and/or consent violates the Massachusetts duty of good faith and fair dealing.

Like the claim for breaching the contract by reducing the commission rates, Judge Casper ruled that this issue too was subject to more than one reasonable conclusion, which meant she would not throw it out on summary judgment, and on this claim, Valle would get his day in court.

The trial

That day came in May. The federal jury had little trouble finding across the board for Valle and against Powertech, unanimously deciding that Powertech breached the 2009 rep contract by failing to pay the agreed upon commissions during the contract period, and further finding that it violated the duty of good faith and fair dealing, the jury awarded Valle \$389,665.48 in damages. Then, the jury awarded Valle an additional \$387,678.91 for Powertech’s withholding of the two years of post-termination commissions.

Powertech’s apparent strategy of devising vague contract language to fuel a “flexible” approach to paying commissions plainly backfired and stands as a caution to reps and principals alike to draft contracts as though their terms matter. Valle insisted that they do, and today has at least 777,344.39 reasons to appreciate that he enforced his rights. ■

Electronics Representatives Association



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In the current environment are you optimistic, or pessimistic; is the glass half full or half empty? I would like to suggest that it is in the eye of the beholder. The current state of affairs in your territory, or more specifically at your firm, will influence how you answer this question.

Based on different media outlet reports, it seems like things in general are going from bad to worse all around the world. In our industry, we've watched component lead times skyrocket, and while they are beginning to come down, this phenomenon has taken its toll. The period of "over-booking" is over; order frequencies and volumes are going down. The uncertainty fostered by the trade friction between U.S. and China and the tariffs both add to the consternation.

In its May 2019 Survey Summary, TPC reported the following, "Our May 2019 Semi industry survey of over 20K electronic industry professionals showed mixed results. While we are seeing slight improvements in demand; bookings and cancellation trends continue to be choppy. Additionally, inventories, while generally improving, continued to be elevated in some product areas." Elevated inventories cause pushouts, cancellations and delayed billings for both distributors and manufacturers.

On the Electronics Sourcing NA website for June 2019, in an article by James Carbone, TTT's COO Mike Morton was quoted saying: "The year started off absolutely fantastic..." He went on to talk about the growth across their sectors in Q1-2019. But while TTT's book-to-bill ratio in the Americas was positive, in Europe it was below 1 and in Asia their backlog is shrinking.

This story is not unique to the U.S. market. There are global concerns as well.

In a June 5 article on the Disty Blog, author Mick Elliott, commenting on the U.K. and Ireland distribution market wrote, "Overall bookings crashed 27 percent in April 2019 compared to the previous month and also showed an 18 percent decline in the same month in 2018. The book-to-bill ratio in April 2019 declined by 14 points to 0.92:1, with the polynomial trend line suggesting a continuing 'flattening' as we progress into Q2'19."

In an April 2019 CNBC article about the International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook Report, it was reported that "China, the second-largest economy in the world, grew by 6.6 percent last year (2018) — its worst performance in 28 years. Their projection is flat to down for 2019 and 2020." More fallout from the trade war and tariffs it seems. The "macro-economic" view is not optimistic as I see it.

But what about the other side of the coin; what's happening on the ground, in our territories and in our own firms? Many of the reps that I talk to are optimistic and it seems with good reason. They report positive things happening in their "micro-economies." There is business out there, they say, if you are willing to work and beat the bushes. Just this morning, one of our own customers placed a brand new \$300,000+ purchase order, all shipping within four months. The number of legitimate business opportunities we are seeing has grown in 2019. This month we are in the process of signing a new line that already holds some business and has a great upside. I am squarely in the optimism camp; the glass half full mood describes mine. How can your outlook be described?

Change is coming whether we are ready for it or not; and at a mind boggling pace. It seems that Tampa has been a hotbed for testing autonomous vehicles. Recent news announced that a bill would be signed that would likely mean we could see driverless trucks on the road by 2020. Not sure I'm ready for this. This is being fueled by the fast pace of technology that we are seeing in all aspects of our lives, personal and business. Here are some of the key technology items that have evolved, seemingly overnight. They include 5G, AI, IIoT, AR,VR, digital twins, data analytics, autonomous materials handling, cobots, exoskeletons, generative design, AM and blockchain.

Just moments ago I read an article saying that Florida was looking at using blockchain to bring together many local and state activities. Blockchain is a decentralized register made up of endless connected cryptographic blocks. We are seeing it in use in the supply chain context.

Manufacturing is becoming more and more engaged in the use of "digital twins" in prototyping analyzing and testing. Quite honestly, it seems that technology is moving so fast it is outpacing the ability of most companies to understand, deploy and maximize its use.

Virtual reality is being used to improve healthcare, in flight simulators and in the entertainment world.

In our day-to-day interface with our customers and principals we will encounter many of these and other evolving technologies. We just need to remember our fundamentals and charge ahead. It comes down to not forgetting what we are in business for in the first place. We must look for opportunities that these evolving technologies offer us and how we fit into the picture.

COMPONENTS

Bob Evans, CPMR

EK Micro

Rolling Meadows, Ill.

Optimism vs. pessimism

MATERIALS, ASSEMBLY, PRODUCTION & SUPPLY

Troy Gunnin

Sun Rep Inc.

Tampa, Fla.

Change is in the air



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.

ARIZONA

Arizona ERA hosted its annual Medtronic In-Plant Show in June and an industry luncheon for members and industry associates in July.

The chapter also is finalizing the fall date for its General Dynamics In-Plant Show. The event will feature speakers from Benchmark Electronics who will discuss why the company is bringing manufacturing back to Arizona and making substantial investment in the territory.

Planning is underway for the 2020 Sonoran Silicon Valley Tech Show after an overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees and exhibitors about this year's event which attracted more than 150 engineers and industry professionals. The next Tech Show is planned for Spring 2020.

The chapter announced that Mike Martin of Spectrum Marketing has been nominated to join the Arizona ERA Board of Directors.

CAROLINAS

The Carolinas Chapter is continuing to hold its bimonthly breakfast meetings.

In May, the chapter also held a Cyber Security educational event featuring guest speaker Walt Turner, vice president of Secure Web Apps.

CHICAGOLAND - WISCONSIN

Chicagoland-Wisconsin ERA hosted an event featuring guest speaker ERA CEO Walter Tobin in June. The event was very well attended by chapter members and focused on ERA's national initiatives and the results from those efforts.

INDIANA - KENTUCKY

Indiana - Kentucky ERA will host its 2019 Industry Golf Outing at GCI in Zionsville, Ind., on Aug. 23.

METRO NEW YORK

The chapter hosted its Fourth Annual Charity Golf Outing in June at St. Georges Golf & Country Club in East Setauket, N.Y., which raises money for Long Island Cares to benefit veterans. The event featured breakfast, a shotgun-start golf outing, lunch, dinner, prizes games, raffles and a 50/50 blind auction.

Non-golfers were also invited to join in the fun with an afternoon of food and drinks, spiritual readings and music. The guests were asked to bring a food item for the Food Pantry of Long Island Cares.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

In May, Northern California ERA held an educational event at the Faultline Brewing Company featuring guest speaker Anthony G. Tarantino, Ph.D., of Santa Clara University. Tarantino presented on the topic "How to Weaponize LinkedIn to Increase Sales Leads Quickly and Cheaply."

PACIFIC NORTHWEST



June 2019 Pacific Northwest Chapter event

The chapter hosted a networking event in early June. The event attracted distributors, rep firms and even a small local CM. Marco Micheletti, a friend to many in the market, held an informative presentation, "The Importance of a Solid Supply Chain." The chapter plans to hold three to four similar events each year.

2019 ERA COLT program announced

ERA has confirmed the 2019 dates for its hands-on educational Chapter Officers Leadership Training (COLT) program. The one-hour webinar segment of the program will take place on Wednesday, Oct. 23, 2019, and the in-person meeting will be held in Chicago, Nov. 6-7, 2019, at the Double Tree Hilton O'Hare-Rosemont.

COLT focuses on chapter management and planning tactics and is a vital tool for all chapter managers, board members and anyone taking on a chapter leadership role. The program details how to effectively run a chapter including hosting events, chapter bylaws, member recruitment, educational programming and more.

COLT is coordinated by Bob Evans, CPMR, president of EK Micro and chair of ERA's Chapter Leadership Council; Stephanie Tierney, membership outreach coordinator for ERA; and Walter Tobin, ERA CEO

For more information on ERA's COLT program or to register, visit <http://era.org/era-events/chapter-officers-leadership-training-colt>.



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

The Southern California Chapter of ERA has had a busy 2019 hosting several events over the past few months.

In March, the chapter hosted an event featuring guest speaker, renowned Chapman University Professor in Economics, Dr. Raymond Sfeir. Dr. Sfeir spoke to chapter members on the topic of Southern California economics.

The chapter also introduced its new Board of Directors, at an event held at the Oak Creek Golf Club in Irvine, Calif.

In June, the Proudbird table top and social networking event offered chapter members several technical seminars and networking opportunities.

The chapter also organized a panel discussion over lunch at the Courtyard Marriott in Cypress, Calif., in July. The panel featured experienced electronics industry members who discussed how to best utilize LinkedIn for reps.

Southern California ERA is planning a number of events through the rest of 2019, including the ERA SoCal – Sagebrush 16th Annual Summer Social & Table Top Show on Aug. 6; various chapter meetings; as well

as a charity golf tournament on Nov. 18, which will benefit Operation Homefront.

SOUTHWEST CHAPTER



June 2019 Southwest ERA Chapter event.

Southwest ERA hosted a chapter event over lunch at Ye Shire Tavern in Dallas in June. The event had an excellent turn out with attendees brainstorming how to grow members and chapter events attendance. Byron Holloway of Fralia Company & Associates gave an in-depth presentation using tools to dissect a system down to the component level. The presentation applied to a variety of end products, and was very well received by the audience.

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Join us at the next MBP workshop that will be held during our Certified Professional Manufacturers' Representative (CPMR) program in Austin, Texas. Come early to join CPMR participants, faculty at the Monday reception as well as attend selected CPMR sessions that week. Find more details about MBP under the Classes menu on the website.



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Other ERA Services & Publications

(Call 312-419-1432 or go to era.org.)

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- Guidelines for: Becoming a Successful Rep; Establishing and Benefiting from Rep Councils; Agreements between Sales Reps and Manufacturers; Agreements between Stocking Reps and Manufacturers; Agreements between Reps and Sub-Reps; Agreements between a Rep Firm and Its Salespeople; Evaluating a Prospective Principal; Evaluating a Prospective Rep; Developing New Markets with Professional Field Sales Reps
- Line Portfolio Evaluation
- Outsourced Field Sales: Adding Value for the Customer (CD)
- Outsourcing Field Sales (Fortune Magazine Reprint)
- The Value of Outsourced Field Sales (EBN Reprint)
- Selling Through Manufacturers' Representatives
- ERA Code of Ethics
- Recommended Technical Standards for Distribution Point-of-Sale Reporting
- FAQs Manufacturers Ask About Representatives
- Split Influence Recommendations for the Electronics Industry
- State Rep Commission Protection Acts
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ERA Meetings & Programs

- 2019 COLT Webinar - Oct. 23, 2019
- Board of Directors Meeting - Oct. 24, 2019
- COLT In-Person Workshop - Nov. 6-7, 2019
- 2020 ERA Conference - Feb. 23-25, 2020

A book review and recommendation by Dan Beaulieu

Notorious: Business Lessons from History's Most Ruthless Leaders

by Steve Williams

Copyright: 2019 The Right Approach Consulting

Price: \$30.00

Pages: 197

A bit of advice from the bad guys

Over the years, we have turned to a number of business experts; reading their words and “stealing” their ideas. We have talked about Peters, Godin, Tracy and a number of other business experts, and we have benefitted from all of them. Now I thought it would be interesting to delve into the dark side; to see how the bad guys got things done. How the most evil people who ever lived managed to get so far, before they were finally stopped by the forces of good.

I turned to my friend and fellow industry writer and guru, Steve Williams, who just coincidentally has written a new book titled *Notorious*, where he talks about the management skills of bad guys like Al Capone and Genghis Khan, which if you think about it, is a fascinating idea. These people were the best at what they did, at the top of their field; they succeeded and went pretty far, until they did not.

I thought it would be fun and, er ... inspiring, to check out some of the leadership skills of these dark leaders.

From Steve's new book, here are some of the leadership secrets of some of the worse people who ever lived.

Sun Tzu on strategy: He was a Chinese general and military strategist who wrote *The Art of War* — the quintessential handbook on how to successfully wage war. This book was written in the 6th century BC, yet still applicable today. This is what Sun Tzu has to say about strategy:

- Avoid your competitor's strengths and exploit their weaknesses.
- Use strategic and tactical preparation to act with blinding speed.

Attila the Hun on leadership: One of the most famous bad guys of all time lived in the 5th century BC. Attila loved war and terrorized and ravaged the European continent. This is what Attila advises about leadership:

- Pick your enemies wisely.
- Rely on the art of negotiation.

Freydis Eiriksdottir on overcoming adversity: I had no idea who Freydis was until I read Steve's book. It turns out she was Erik the Red's daughter and Leif Erikson's half-sister. Talk about a pedigree! She was a trooper in her own right. While the rest of the family was finding new lands, she was the one who was stuck with settling them. Doing that, she saw plenty of hardships so it's no surprise that we would look at her expertise in the business of overcoming adversity. Her most famous quote was “Hand me an axe!” Here are her two tidbits of advice on overcoming adversity:

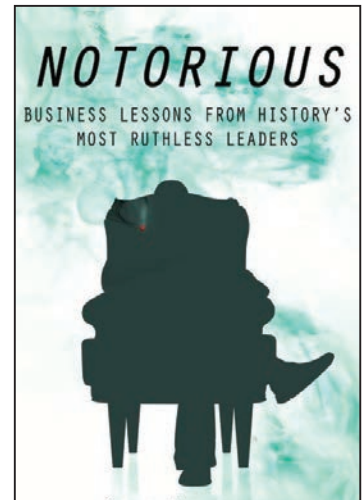
- Never fear failure.
- Walk the walk.

Genghis Khan on power: We all know this guy. He rose from nothing to become the leader of the Mongols, which is no small task. I've been to China, I've met some Mongols selling their giant knives laid out on furs on sidewalks in downtown Shanghai, and they are a bunch of tough dudes. It took a pretty powerful guy to lead them. Here is what he says about power:

- Lead from the front.
- Get the right people.

Blackbeard on building your brand: Certainly, one of my favorites! Blackbeard was an English pirate who operated around the West Indies and the eastern coast of Britain's North American colonies. This guy knew all about building his brand, who could forget his old candles in the beard trick? He knew how to etch an unforgettable impression for sure: Here is his advice:

- You are your logo.
- Image is everything.



(continued on next page)

BOOK REVIEW: Notorious

(continued from previous page)

Al Capone on exploiting your niche: Scarface! Capone's multi-million dollar Chicago operation in bootlegging, prostitution and gambling dominated the organized crime scene. He knew what his customers wanted, and he knew how to keep them happy, or else... Here are his words of wisdom:

- Know what your customers want.
- Customer satisfaction is key to success.

Sonny Barger on extreme leadership: Ralph Hubert "Sonny" Barger is an American author, actor, outlaw biker and convicted felon, who is a founding member of the Oakland, Calif., chapter of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club. This guy knew how to lead, and more or less, control a bunch of mean-spirited but fun-loving thugs, so who better to teach us about not just leadership, but extreme leadership:

- Great leaders know they don't have all the answers.
- Create an environment of empowerment.

Steve Jobs on insane success: Okay, so Steve was probably not as bad a guy as say Blackbeard, but he was certainly able to make his workers cry, and after all, he did fly the Jolly Roger from the top of the building where his gang of outlaw designers were building the infamous LISA. And, of course, he was one of the most creative people of our lifetimes. I certainly believe he knew what he was talking about when he talked about designing your way to insane success:

- Simple is better.
- Value creativity over structure.

I had a lot of fun reading this book and a lot of fun learning what these inspirational leaders had to say. If I were you, I would not miss reading this one. Steve's book, *Notorious: Business Lessons from History's Most Ruthless Leaders*, is available at www.tracqms.com/shop. The eBook version will be available soon on Amazon.com and in bookstores near you! ■

*Dan Beaulieu is the president and founder of D.B. Management LLC, 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 danbbeaulieu@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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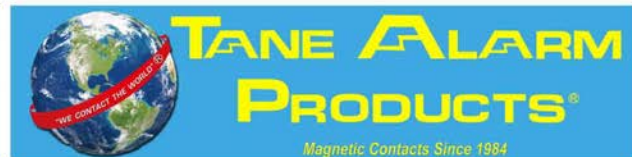
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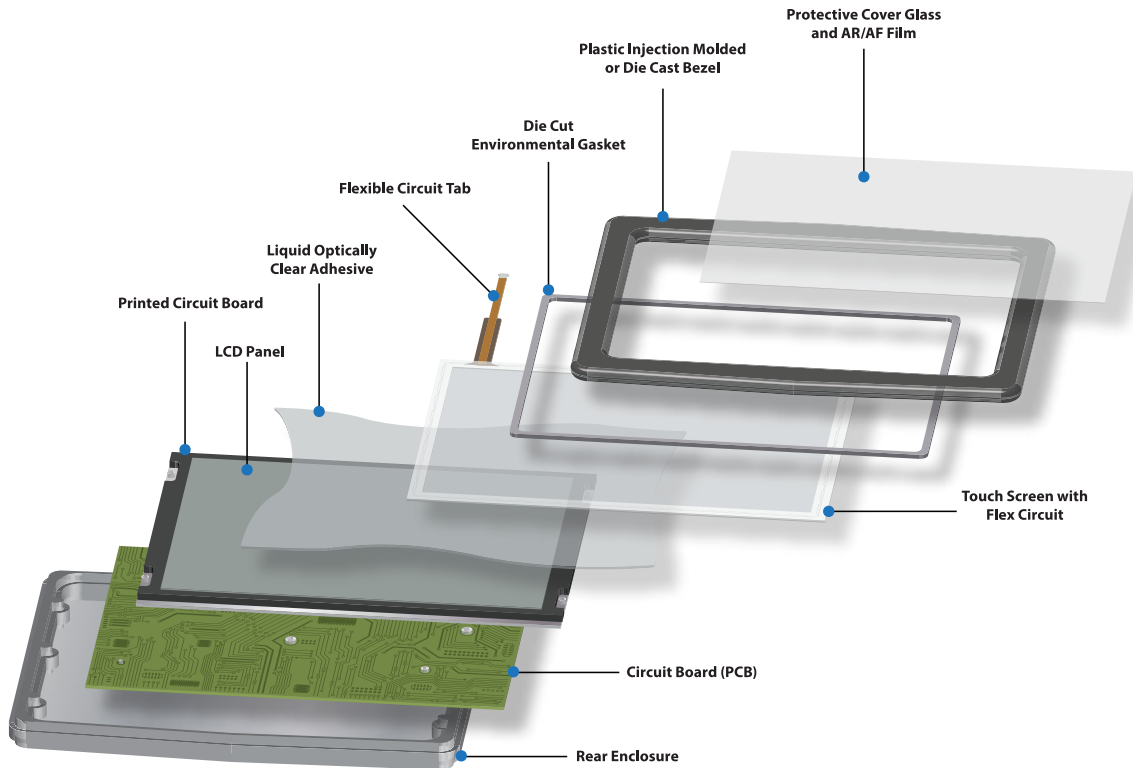
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