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 Electronics Representatives Association

WINTER 2023

THE BLENDING OF THE INDUSTRIAL AND ELECTRONIC WORLDS

Automation: The Fourth Industrial Revolution is Here

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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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WINTER 2023



THE BLENDING OF THE INDUSTRIAL AND ELECTRONIC WORLDS

Automation: The Fourth Industrial Revolution is Here

COVER STORY

The last two years have brought several seasons of change to industrial automation distribution. COVID-19 pandemic shut-downs, supply chain challenges and the Great Resignation have significantly impacted what industrial automation will look like and how distributors should react today to meet those future needs.

It's a fact. Automation in the manufacturing industry—the fourth industrial revolution, or “Industry 4.0”—will be driven by the interconnection of technology and the data it provides, and distributors must make substantial investments and adjustments to remain relevant and viable.

Forecasting new models of doing business, budgeting capital investments in technology and recognizing paradigm shifts in industrial production will be the difference makers.

The value-add model

Distributors cannot simply rely on moving parts. Those days are over. It's not just about storing products anymore; it's about being a value-add resource for both manufacturers and customers. Right now, manufacturers still have several distributors from which to choose, and they don't only need a warehouse.

Customers can purchase products online, also from several distributors.

So, what added value is the distributor bringing to the manufacturer? To the customer? What is the differentiator?

For manufacturers, what are the marketing and advertising offerings? Manufacturers are looking for partners that have a plan for highlighting their products.

For customers, what technical expertise is there? Customers can purchase products anywhere, but where they need help is in the technical usage, integration and troubleshooting of industrial automation products.

Digital strategy

Industrial automation is going digital, and e-commerce provides the widest reach for attracting new customers. Manufacturers are investing in research and development, not in a customer acquisition and customer experience digital strategy.

The bottom line for manufacturers is about sales and how many customers are purchasing

their products through the distributor. In addition to a value-add proposition for manufacturers, a digital strategy for how efforts will garner sales and increase the number of customers purchasing products is a must-have.

Distributors will need to be more focused on the digital distribution of product knowledge, technical expertise and customer support as well as what digital channels customers want to use. Many current and future customers are not accustomed to flipping through an owner's manual or technical documentation and spec sheets to locate their answers. They will “Google” it or “YouTube” it.

Methods for a digital strategy must consider the types of avenues and channels with which manufacturers and customers prefer to exchange and learn information.

A digital strategy will only be as good as its digital e-commerce, digital merchandising and product information distribution platform.

Consolidation

The capital investments and expenditures required to put a value-add model and a digital strategy in place will simply not be available to every distributor. What's more, to maintain a robust and thriving

relationship with manufacturers, significant investments in product information management systems (PIMs), enterprise resource planning systems (ERPs), e-commerce platforms, digital merchandising and human capital in the form of a marketing team of copywriters, content creators, front-end and back-end web developers, SEO specialists and marketing managers is necessary to lead these efforts.

Until manufacturers re-shore and get automated, supply chain issues will continue to drag, and distributors will need to consider ways of expanding lines while also shortening supply chain issues.

Mergers and acquisitions will further alter the industrial automation distributor landscape. Five years from now, the number of industrial distributors will be half of what they are today.

Human capital shortages

In the wake of the Great Resignation, human capital is now at an all-time low. The effects of this shortage will be felt in several key areas for industrial automation distribution.

By Allison Sabia

The adage in real estate is “Location, location, location.”

For industrial manufacturing, it is “Automation, automation, automation.”

(continued on page 6)

COVER STORY: Industrial automation trends

(continued from page 5)

First, and most importantly, manufacturers are ramping up re-shoring efforts to overcome the obstacles brought on by supply chain challenges. What this means, though, is that new onshore factories built in North America are going to be automated. The forecast of labor shortages and the need to increase production efficiency will drive new facilities to the industrial automation sector for direction, products and support.

Second, the need for automation products is going to increase, and now is the time for distributors to position themselves in the marketplace as a resource. This will be when a value-add model, digital strategy and consolidation efforts can pay off for distributors.

Lastly, from manufacturing to maintenance, repair and operations, the number of maintenance staff, operators and facilitators will be impacted, thus leaving many maintenance operations left to rely on automation. However, during this transition, many will lean heavily on distributors for assistance with product knowledge, troubleshooting, installation and technical support.

Diversity of thought

For distributors that consolidate, this will be a little easier, but for some, hiring will be challenging and tough. It is no reason to settle. If anything, it is an opportunity to take a bold look at hiring practices.

Hiring the right people over hiring the best people—that is, the best person on paper may not be the best person for the organization. The need for a diversity of thought in the automation economy will be huge.

While it is true that every company must decide on its own preferred qualities in employees, favoring diversity of thought as a quality in new candidates can help organizations gain new perspectives, approaches and points of view for problem-solving, innovation and processes. Tackling these types of issues with new ways of thinking fosters growth and retention.

To realize the benefits of diversity of thought, distributors should implement ways of assessing a candidate’s approach to industrial automation distribution.

Distributors should incorporate assessments and include a set of pre-hire questions for prospective candidates to address. What is most important is to seek out and utilize tools that are available to evaluate a candidate’s quality of diversity of thought before and during the interview.

Automation and the rise of data

The future of automation is data, and lots of it. Advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics, machine learning (ML) and predictive intelligence are leading the charge in the “smart factories” and re-shoring efforts of the immediate future. These advancements are also making significant inroads in maintenance, repair and operations, thus allowing maintenance to become more automated.

As the industrial automation industry continues to integrate Industry 4.0 technologies, 2023 will see a surge toward digital transformation. Manufacturers and maintenance operations will concentrate their efforts by investing in highly interconnected IT infrastructures and architectures to meet the challenges that data-driven automation requires.

The foundation necessary to meet data-driven operational efficiency requires a flexible, scalable and highly interconnected IT

(continued from previous page)

infrastructure. This level of connectivity enables manufacturers to control, operate and monitor their entire system of machines, applications and processes. This is where the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) makes it possible to connect, monitor and receive the data necessary for automation.

Using connected sensors and machinery, a complete data picture of the manufacturing process can be realized. IIoT not only allows operators and engineers to observe system health and performance but also to collect vast amounts of data to be analyzed for a host of preventative, predictive and performative purposes.

One of the most exciting trends will be in the fight against unplanned downtime. Over time, AI and ML software can detect subtle signs in equipment and processes to optimize maintenance schedules, find problems and anticipate breakdowns before they result in expensive downtime or damage.

Distributors will need to align their value-add and digital strategies with these developments.

The automation revolution is here

The adage in real estate is “location, location, location.” For industrial manufacturing, it is “automation, automation, automation.” Automation in manufacturing, distribution, warehouses, and yes – fast food, will become the norm. New automotive manufacturing markets like electric vehicles and the push for renewable and sustainable energy will fuel a rush for industrial automation parts and products for the safe transport of high-voltage energy and reliable connections for consumers to tap into for activities such as recharging and disposing of batteries.

And the list goes on...

Out of the ashes of the pandemic, supply bottlenecks and the Great Resignation, comes the Automation Revolution. ■

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About the author



Allison Sabia has been in the electronics distribution industry for over 25 years. She is currently the president and CEO, and Board member, of Galco Industrial Electronics. Previously, Allison spent 23 years at Arrow Electronics where she served in senior-level roles in sales, marketing, operations and e-commerce.

Allison received her BBA and MBA from Hofstra University. In 2016, Allison was named to the “Women Worth Watching” list by the Profiles in Diversity Journal. In 2019, Allison was also named to the Top 50 Women in eCommerce list. She is passionate about breaking down barriers for other women to succeed. She mentors several people with the goal of guiding the next level of leadership forward. She is actively involved in volunteer work and lives in the Denver area with her husband and two children.

Focusing resources on the industrial sector



Bill Gallucci
President
Peerless Electronics

ERA interviewed Bill Gallucci, president of Peerless Electronics, Inc., to discuss the plan to diversify its primarily military/aerospace-based business by focusing on growing its recently rebranded industrial division, Peerless Industrial. Gallucci discussed why his company is headed in this direction, what trends he's seeing in the marketplace and what opportunities this could present manufacturers' reps and distributors.

ERA: Tell us about the trends in the marketplace and new applications you're seeing that led your company to focus its resources on the industrial sector.

Bill Gallucci: When I started my career in the electronics distribution world, the industrial sector, in my opinion, was perceived as the non-glamorous side of the business. Industrial applications at the time did not have the sophistication they do today. That has changed dramatically through the years. Think about the new industrial-type of products that have been introduced in the past decade which are fueling the next generation of applications. Products are getting "smarter." Self-driving vehicles, farming equipment, mining, refrigeration, home appliances, warehousing forklifts with sensors for added safety, robotic surgery, heating and cooling – just to name a few.

Many manufacturers and rep organizations are realizing that industrial products are an opportunity for growth and diversification in the coming years. The sector began expanding even faster with the birth of dependable reliable wireless. It opened the door for greater capabilities, which gave organizations the ability to automate their warehousing. BMW is a perfect example. They have an automated robotic manufacturing facility in the Carolinas with very few human touches on their assembly lines. These are just a few examples of advancing technology and the

opportunities it is presenting – and why Peerless is putting additional resources into this sector.

ERA: What are the challenges and nuances in selling industrial products? Do you have to provide separate training and employ a separate sales staff to do this?

Gallucci: When we began our journey to expand in the industrial world, we were faced with many challenges: hiring experienced industrial sales leaders, adding industrial product lines, advertising to new markets, creating content on our website and social media that is dedicated to industrial customers and applications, training on new lines and sales techniques for both inside and outside sales – all of this took time. When COVID-19 arrived, our industrial initiative slowed a bit primarily because many industrial customers were not considered essential. They shut down first and reopened last.

ERA: Is there customer overlap in selling these products, or are the customer bases completely separate?

Gallucci: We are learning that even though we have different types of customers in different markets, there's a lot of similarity in the products they require. Our industrial sales leader said it best, "The outside of the customer's building will not say 'Industrial.'"

ERA: What opportunities does the industrial sector provide manufacturers' reps and distributors? How can they take advantage of this opportunity?

Gallucci: The industrial market continues to provide newer technology that translates to greater opportunities for both reps and distributors. Reps should consider looking at industrial-type product lines. Many manufacturers have realized that they also need to diversify their business

and have created an industrial segment by acquiring industrial manufacturers. This will benefit the rep community because manufacturers do not have the bandwidth to hire hundreds of salespeople to drive the sales process. Reps may have opportunities with manufacturers with whom they already have relationships.

ERA: What are some of the broader shifts happening in the industry that could make this the opportune time to look towards the industrial sector?

Gallucci: Growth in online sales is going to double; retail shipments have risen by 25 percent. Fifty-eight percent of supply chain leaders believe logistics will benefit from the improved technology and then on top of that, you have 25 percent of the workforce that are age 55 and over.

The perfect storm is brewing. The pandemic has accelerated the number of people retiring and the next generation of engineers and sales are stepping up to the plate. We are finding that the next generation is relying on technology to improve efficiencies. This might well mean fewer face-to-face meetings and more video conferences. Don't get me wrong, face-to-face meetings will still be required but they will be limited to very important meetings. As we evolve, we need to ask, "What's next?" Our world is changing much faster than before, and you constantly need to make certain that you are aligned with the right manufacturers and understand your customers' future needs. ■

Many manufacturers and distributors are realizing that industrial products are an opportunity for growth and diversification in the coming years.

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Every day presents an exciting challenge for this NEXGEN member



Emily Bannister
 Outside Sales & Operations
 Manager
 C C Electro Sales, Inc.

To gain better insight into how young professionals in the electronics industry have survived and thrived, The Representor interviewed Emily Bannister, outside sales and operation manager at C C Electro Sales, Inc.

Bannister shares some of the challenges and excitement of entering the rep world in the midst of a global pandemic.

Please tell us a little bit about yourself (personally and professionally).

I am a third generation manufacturer's representative. Prior to joining the industry, I worked in public accounting for three years. I went to Ohio University and received degrees in both accounting and dance. I now live in Indianapolis with my husband, Alec, and our dog, Michie. When I'm not in the office, I enjoy spending time with family, traveling and staying active.

How long have you worked in the electronics industry?

I have been in the electronics industry for three years. I continue to learn something new every day!

What made you choose this industry as your current career path?

I came from an accounting background, so originally, I came on board to help with commissions at C C Electro. I started to do inside sales as well as marketing too, and before I knew it, I was also supporting an outside sales territory.

What are some of the main challenges you encountered as you embarked on your career journey?

My primary challenges have centered around my lack of technical knowledge and entering the sales world in the middle of a global pandemic. It has been difficult to create relationships with customers and distributors (long lead times and raw material shortages have not helped either) but we are all experiencing similar issues and can work through them together to help build relationships and hopefully see better days soon.

What steps have you taken to overcome these challenges and ensure that you can establish and nurture a successful career?

I am lucky to be surrounded by many industry experts within my own rep firm, the manufacturers we represent and local distributor offices. I try to learn as much as I can from every interaction I have with these experts. I like to use the "Why Am I Talking - WAIT" method in meetings. It helps

me to really focus on listening and absorbing as much information as possible from the participants of the meeting.

What were some training tools or networking/industry events that you found beneficial to your professional growth?

I have really enjoyed collaborating and discussing with the ERA NEXGEN group. I find our conversations very helpful and I leave each meeting with new ideas and fresh motivation to try something new. The ERA Virtual Sales Training has also been helpful for my professional growth. I am planning on attending the ERA national conference for the first time this year and am very excited.

Do you think that there is enough new talent entering the electronics industry and what could make this field more attractive to young professionals?

I think we are slowly starting to see new talent enter the electronics industry. It is an industry that requires a lot of patience and persistence which can be tough to pitch to new talent. What is exciting about the electronics industry, and can help attract new talent, is the ability to work on different products and projects daily with many different large customers. Every day presents a new challenge that is sure to keep even the most seasoned veterans on their toes.

Where do you see your profession and the industry 10 to 20 years from now?

I think the industry will have a lot of fresh faces and new technologies to support it 20 years from now. I also think the hybrid model of working remotely and in the office is here to stay and juggling in-person as well as virtual meetings with customers will continue to be part of our jobs.

Professionally, what keeps you up at night?

Making sure I am continuing to provide value as a manufacturer's representative to my customers, especially young engineers, principals I represent and distributors.



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Jake Metzger
Regional Vice President
Hughes-Peters

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 Jake Metzger, regional vice president at Hughes-Peters.

The Representor asked Metzger a few questions about his time in the electronics distribution business and his experiences with ERA. Here is what he had to say.

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I reside in Houston, Texas, where I was born and raised. I am married to Kelly, my wife of 26 years and we have three grown sons. I attended Texas A&M University and graduated from The University of St. Thomas in Houston with a degree in communications. Currently I am a regional vice president for the central region at Hughes-Peters. I have been with Hughes-Peters for 21 years.

How long have you been in the distribution business?

My career in electronics distribution dates back to the mid 1990s. I am fortunate to have experiences across many aspects of the business that include picking parts in the warehouse, accounts receivable, product management, sales and sales management.

How did you become interested in the electronics industry?

I grew up in it. My father worked for Sterling Electronics and then had a long, successful career at Kent Electronics. His daily actions and work ethic provided for our family. It made me realize this is a business I can make a career in if I applied a similar work ethic. During summer breaks I was able to work in various departments and gain exposure to what each did – sort of like an ongoing internship. After graduating from college, I got an inside sales job with Kent Electronics and have never looked back.

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

The people, serving customers and working for great companies. First, it is the people who I have formed relationships with – customers, manufacturers, manufacturers' sales reps, co-workers and competitors – that are equal parts business and friendship. Many of them are part of ERA! When I think about the products and services our industry provides and who we provide it to – life-saving medical equipment, wireless devices that keep businesses and families connected, food/agriculture equipment, automotive/aerospace, military and defense – all of them have an impact on our lives every day and all of them rely on the electronics industry. It really is amazing when you look at it from that perspective. Thirdly, we all devote a lot of time to work and I am lucky to have worked at great companies like Kent Electronics and now Hughes-Peters. Working side by side with dynamic, talented people in our

fast-paced industry is inspiring and challenges me every day.

Briefly describe your organization.

Hughes-Peters is a multi-regional, IP&E distributor that services OEMs and CEMs. With headquarters in Dayton, Ohio, Hughes-Peters has 14 branch office locations serving customers in the South Central, Midwest, Great Lakes, Ohio Valley, Southeast, New York and New Jersey markets. Our inventory model is built around our partnered customers to manage their pipeline of components. We have a best-in-class line card and we offer true flexibility in our service to the customer, including our value-added services.

As technologies evolve along with the launch of new products and processes, Hughes-Peters continues to remain on the cutting edge. We are dedicated to creating and offering value that best supports our customers' needs. Service offerings include inventory management, Kanbans, wireless warehouse, point of use delivery and being a low cost provider of parts and services.

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

Hughes-Peters became an ESOP company in December 2021. The ESOP allows all Hughes-Peters employees to share directly in the success they are helping create. It also sets the company's long-term direction. Hughes-Peters remains committed to building strong relationships with our customers, suppliers and their manufacturer rep networks.

What are some things you enjoy outside of the workplace?

I enjoy time with family, practicing my faith, enjoying friends and fishing. My wife and I like traveling, cooking and playing cards. I volunteer with the Knights of Columbus and serve on the board of directors for the University of St. Thomas Alumni Association.

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

I have an identical twin brother. He is in the electrical distribution industry and our paths cross when visiting common manufacturers' reps or customers from time to time. It can generate double takes and some good laughs. ■

Welcome to the upside-down world!

Did you watch the Netflix Series “Stranger Things”? (If not, I recommend it.) In this series a strange world called the “Upside Down” is the main theme and plot line – a world that seems to make no sense as everything is “upside down.”

I maintain that our world today resembles that world a lot. What seems to make sense to the normal person may, in fact, mean something totally different – something we think may be a good thing may, in fact, be bad.

I am certainly not an economist or any sort of financial wizard. I just read what I read and try to figure out what it means to me, and the impact on ERA – but it can be confusing these days.

Let me give you a few examples.

A strong U.S. dollar

We have a strong U.S. dollar! That's good, right?

The U.S. dollar has risen 15.2 percent since June 7, 2021. Companies are starting to cite a strong dollar in their earnings releases. In addition to the trade-weighted index, the strength of the U.S. dollar can be seen in the foreign exchange rates for key markets.

For instance, the U.S. dollar achieved its strongest performance against the British pound since March 1985. In addition, the U.S. dollar is at its strongest level since August 1990 against the Japanese yen, in 20 years against the euro and since December 2007 against the Chinese yuan renminbi. So that's good, right? USA, USA! Our dollar is strong!

Oops, not so fast...

It is important to note that a stronger dollar has an impact on U.S. manufacturers, making it more expensive for U.S. exports but lowering the cost of imported raw materials imports. Our manufactured goods cost more overseas and imports are cheaper for U.S. companies to buy – that does not sound good!

In an economy where companies are experiencing tighter margins due to inflation and less demand, a stronger dollar makes it easier

for them to source goods from overseas, potentially putting their local U.S.-based suppliers out of business.

On the plus side, a rising dollar will probably drive U.S. inflation down somewhat because it makes imports into the U.S. cheaper. However, the con is that it's harder for U.S. corporations to sell their goods overseas because they are now more expensive.

Huh, what?

Low unemployment

Now, how can this be anything but good? This should be an easy one. Common sense may tell us that low unemployment is good. More folks working, making money and paying taxes equals a happy workforce, a happy nation and a happier economy!

Not so fast.

When unemployment is low, we can have too much of a good thing. Low unemployment, even after the Fed has started to raise borrowing costs at the fastest level in decades, means that the economy is still running hot, and that's driving inflation higher. More people working and making money, and then spending more money, can help fuel inflation perhaps to the point of us resulting in a recession.

Inflation has historically had an inverse relationship with unemployment. This means that when inflation rises, unemployment drops. Higher unemployment, on the other hand, equates to lower inflation. When more people are working, they have the power to spend, which leads to an increase in demand of goods and services.

The November job report added 263,000 new jobs and kept the jobless rate at 3.7 percent, almost a half-century low. Plus, the job market is incredibly tight with 10 million open jobs.

So, a low unemployment rate is both good and bad...

Huh? What?

Low interest rates

Now, how can these be anything but good?

Lower interest rates stimulate economic



by Walter E. Tobin
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There's no place like home

In June of 2020, I wrote an article for *The Representor* entitled, "I Have a Feeling We're not in Kansas Anymore" in which I chronicled the three periods I thought we would go through as the world faced an unprecedented, life-changing, abnormal, uncomfortable, unfamiliar, strange and once-in-a-century situation. (I suspect you know what I am referring to.)

Imagine my shock and surprise when some two years later, while reporting at the October 2022 ERA Board of Directors meeting regarding the ERA website's Google Analytics metrics, Clare Kluck, ERA's director of communications, noted that: "Side note and fun fact: Chuck Tanzola's column 'I Have a Feeling We're not in Kansas Anymore' continues to get a large number of clicks and visits and is consistently one of our top visited pages each month!"

I vowed to myself that I was done writing about the pandemic, but since I always struggle determining what to write about, I thought "Why not write a sequel article?" So naturally, I went back and read my prior work. I will not repeat everything that I wrote before – you can check it out at www.era.org. (Yes, I know this is an obvious and shameless strategy to keep the click count up.) However, I did find one section that struck me as appropriate for discussion today. In it, I described what I thought the emergence from the pandemic would look like, when I wrote:

"Period 3 – Stability | Beyond COVID-19 (BC19). If today we are searching, then tomorrow we will move towards a new equilibrium beyond Covid-19: I have named that period "stability." When that will be seems to be a moving target, but I have no doubt that a) it will happen; b) it will encompass a combination of the best of the familiar enhanced with lessons learned during this pandemic; and c) by definition it will be different."

A few observations: 1) I think this is the period we are in – it feels like we are moving on and moving beyond COVID-19, or we are at least trying hard to do so (though I recognize that some would debate this based on the latest variants); 2) The observation that this period "will encompass a combination of the best of the familiar enhanced with lessons learned" is pretty accurate, though the mix is still evolving and probably will continue to do so for some time; and 3) When I wrote this, while I recognized the "moving target" nature of the situation, I honestly thought we would reach this period much sooner than we have.

I do find it ironic, though, that I labeled the period "stability." As I think about the industry in early 2023, whether you agree we are past the pandemic or not, I am pretty confident that "stable" is

not the first word I would use to describe where we are. Consider the following:

- Analyst reports seem to indicate fundamental changes in the business climate in at least the first half of 2023. The sales growth we have seen over the past two years looks like it is now slowing significantly. (I just finished listening to one report that predicted single-digit declines in sales of all commodities essentially.)
- Lead times are anything but stable. Over the last two years, we have seen lead times for components extend continuously. Today, however, we are hearing of both reduced and extended lead times depending upon manufacturer and product.
- Reports from the channel are that book-to-bill ratios have been steadily declining as a normal adjustment to unsustainable demands placed on factories over the past two years; while at the same time, I have manufacturers advising customers to place backlog in place through 2024.
- While talent acquisition continues to be an ongoing challenge, and unemployment remains at low levels, recent news of layoffs at major companies across various industries have permeated the news.
- Air travel is largely returning to or exceeding pre-pandemic levels – assuming the planes will fly. Air carriers are reporting that 2023 revenues will exceed 2019, and yet we also cannot avoid reading about major cancellations due to weather, pilot shortages and overall system failures.

These and other factors make a pretty convincing argument that "stability" is indeed not the correct short-term definition of where we are today. I would say that while the long-term prognosis for the electronics industry is certainly still stable (and growing), the correct short-term description would be "uncertainty." From day to day and specific situation to specific situation, it seems we don't know which side of the dichotomy we will find ourselves having to react to.

Two years ago in paraphrasing John Wooden, I wrote that "Flexibility is the key to stability!" Today, I would write that "Understanding, discipline, strategy and execution are critical to working through uncertainty!" That's what I'll be looking for in Austin at the upcoming ERA Conference – "Moving On, Moving Beyond!" Will I see you there?

Click your heels three times and repeat after me... "There's no place like Austin in February!" ■



by Chuck Tanzola, CPMR
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ERA Chairman of the Board
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At ERA, it's full steam ahead



by John O'Brien, CPMR
Coakley, Boyd and Abbott
ERA President
jobrien@cbane.com

With the changing of the calendar, we simultaneously look back on the year that was and forward to the year that will be. 2022 was an interesting year. Constrained supply chain continued to drive customer behaviors. Lead times began to stabilize on some products, while continuing to expand on others. Customers placed orders 12-18 months out to secure their allocation and then the correction began. Those orders were being pushed out or cancelled. Certain markets saw contraction in their forecasts.

At ERA, we held the largest ERA Conference in decades in February 2022, with over 500 attendees. With a record number of sponsors, we were able to secure top-rated speakers like Seth Mattison, our Keynote speaker, and General Session speakers Bernard Baumohl, Jason Dorsey, Crystal Kadakia and of course, Michael Knight. Once again, the breakout sessions were the hit of the event where attendees could gather in a more intimate setting to delve deeper into topics germane to our businesses.

ERA launched a number of new initiatives that really took hold in 2022. The NEXGEN SIG began regularly meeting to discuss topics they felt, as the next generation of leaders, would be pertinent to them. ERA gave out the first White Pin Internship scholarships to English Technical Sales and Aurora Technical Sales.

All in all, 2022 was a great year.

What's in store for 2023?

On the business front, more uncertainty. Bookings have seen a decline. Pushout and cancellation requests continue and while some products are seeing a decrease in lead

times, others continued to be constrained. But, at ERA, it's full steam ahead...

On February 26-28, in Austin, Texas, we will host an even bigger 2023 ERA Conference. With over 600 registered attendees it promises to be a great conference. The committees have been hard at work securing keynote speaker Meridith Elliott Powell who will help us all turn the uncertainty we know we'll be facing, into a competitive edge. Bernard Baumohl will be back for an economic update, while Chris McChesney will explore how to successfully execute on the strategies we develop. Cheryl Cran will be presenting on the future of leadership and of course, no conference would be complete without Michael Knight's insights into "Technology Drivers for 2023 and Beyond."

Of course, there will be extensive breakout sessions and a new venue for the Conference party. A huge shout-out to the over 75 volunteers led by the 2023 Conference committee, the Sponsorship sub-committee, the Keynote sub-committee, the General Session sub-committee and the Breakout Sessions sub-committee. We look forward to seeing you all there. ■

We look back on the year that was and forward to the year that will be.

CONFERENCE UPDATE

Ready to move beyond!

With a show of hands, who is ready to move on from the past three years? I think we are all a little bit over such phrases as "the new normal," "social distancing," and my absolute favorite, "trying times." It's time to put our big kid pants on and move on and beyond from what feels comfortable. Let's get comfortable being uncomfortable.

The conference committee selected the theme "Moving On, Moving Beyond" because we need to move beyond outdated ways of thinking with regards to the way we sell to our customers, manage our teams and hire, retain and motivate our employees. The 2023 ERA Conference is focused on providing techniques to adopt new and successful strategies. Expect some interesting and thought-provoking content, best practices discussions, great takeaways and plenty of time for networking.

Starting in May 2022, more than 50 volunteers from manufacturers' representative firms, manufacturers and distributors have been focused on putting together a program that will maximize your return on investment. The committee has donated their time, energy, talent and passion for knowledge to ensure every session will provide key takeaways.

Keynote Speaker Meridith Elliott Powell will kick off the conference with her presentation, "THRIVE: Turn Uncertainty to your Competitive Advantage." Powell's keynote presentation will motivate your organization to make a plan to take these unprecedented times and an ever-changing, uncertain business landscape and turn them into an opportunity to thrive and grow.

We will again have four general sessions this year. On day one, back by popular demand for the third year in a row, attendee favorite Bernard Baumohl, chief economist for The Economic Outlook Group, will present "Navigating Through Economic Uncertainty." Chris McChesney, author of the best-selling book "The 4 Disciplines of Execution," will present the Monday afternoon general session. McChesney's presentation will dive into the universal challenges for leaders of organizations who are trying to execute strategy amidst numerous

competing priorities and distractions. Cheryl Cran, founder of NextMapping™ and NextMapping.com and author of her newest book "Super.Crucial.Human," will present the morning session on Tuesday, Feb. 28, with her presentation entitled "The Future of Leadership (Hint: It's Human!)"

Michael Knight, returning to present for the sixth time at the conference, will present the closing afternoon session on Tuesday, Feb. 28. The perennial attendee favorite will present "Technology Drivers for 2023 and Beyond," where he will share his insights on the 20 technologies driving the 2020s and how the supply chain, political and economic environment will influence these technologies, as well as be influenced by them.

I have always found that the keynote and general sessions provide very high-level strategic takeaways, but in my mind the real benefit of the conference comes from the breakout sessions. The conference will have 15 different sessions available to attend. Topics range from best practices for distributor, manufacturer and rep relationships, to industry trends and how to stay relevant in the coming years.

I may be biased, but I believe the 2023 ERA conference will be one for the record books. I am truly amazed by the dedication of the volunteers and overwhelmed with the support of more than 150 sponsors. We could not deliver a quality conference without our sponsors and volunteers and for that, I thank you.

Personally, I have had the most amazing two years serving as co-chair and now chair of the conference. I am so proud to walk among the industry's leaders. This California girl, for one, is excited to attend the 2023 conference. See you in the halls of the AT&T Center! ■



by Lori Bruno, CPMR
Luscombe Engineering Co. of
San Francisco
2023 Conference Committee Chair

2022-2023 ERA Member Industry Survey

ERA member companies reflect on 2022 and forecast 2023

ERA's seventh annual industry survey was conducted in December 2022 and presents ERA rep, distributor and manufacturer assessments about their operations and business in 2022-2023, and a forecast for 2023.

The answers to the survey reflect industry members reflecting on a successful 2022: Sixty-one percent of those surveyed rated 2022 as an excellent or very good year. Fifty-six percent reported revenue increases in 2022 greater than 10 percent; an additional 25 percent reported a 5 to 10 percent increase.

When looking ahead to 2023, however, respondents

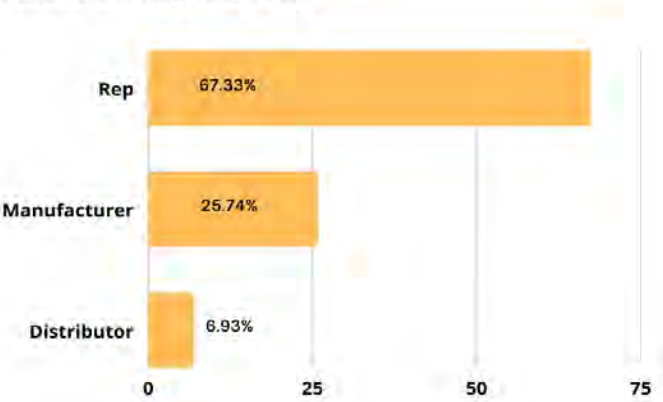
have a bit less enthusiasm.

About half of members surveyed indicate they anticipate revenue growth in 2023 to be less than 5 percent, flat or down. Seventy-five percent of respondents predict an increase in total operating costs in 2023.

Areas of importance, focus or concern for members are the overall state of the economy, supply chain disruption, business partnerships, strategic planning, staffing and digital marketing.

The [full survey results](#) can be viewed on ERA's website. Here's wishing you and your firm a prosperous 2023! ■

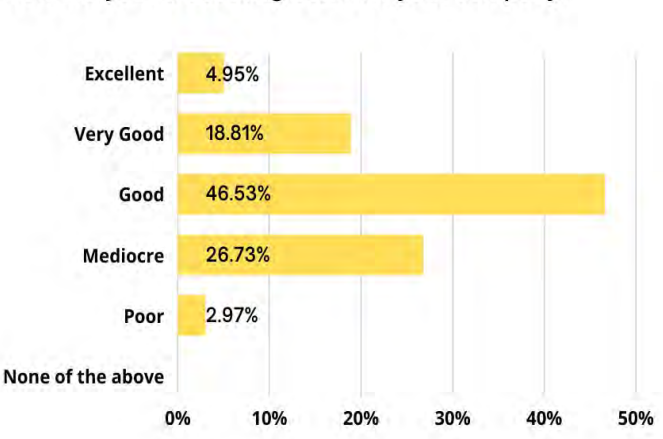
Please identify your firm.



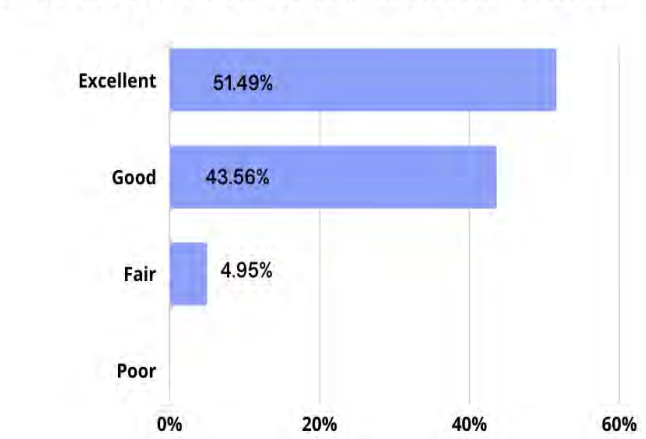
How would you rate 2022 for your company?



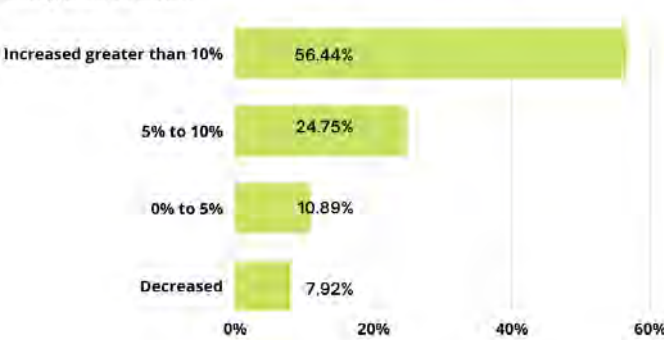
How are you forecasting 2023 for your company?



How would you rate the overall health of your firm today?



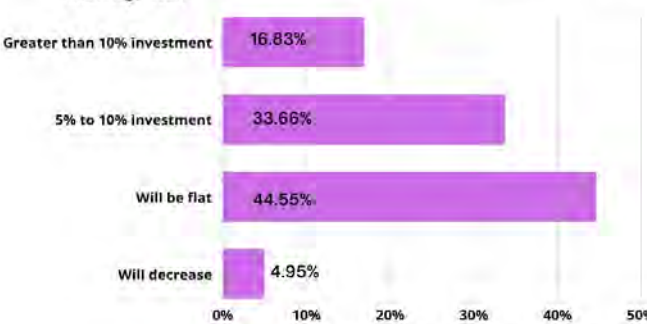
How did your organization's revenue change in 2022 compared to 2021?



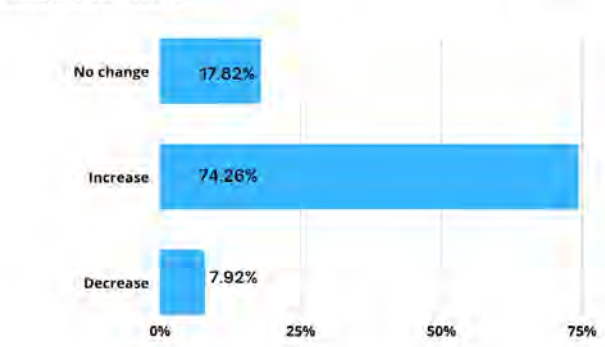
Compared to 2022, what are your organization's growth plans for 2023?



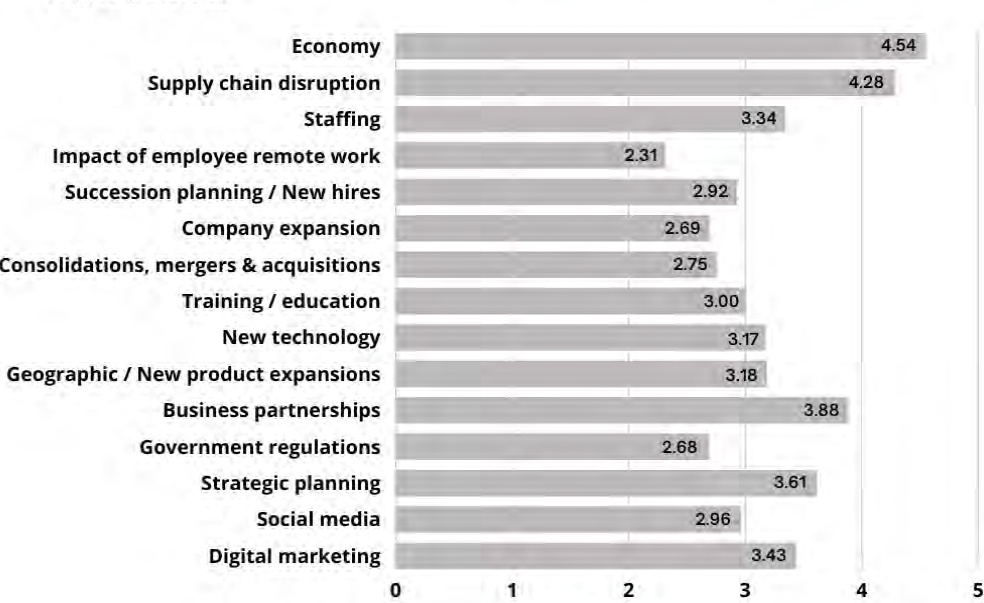
What amount is your organization forecasting in 2023 regarding investment in operating costs? (e.g. software, equipment, hiring, training, etc.)



How do you expect your total operating costs to change in 2023 compared to 2022?



Please rate how much important each of the following topics will be in the coming year to your organization. (1 = not all important, 5 = very important.)



[View the complete ERA 2022-2023 Industry Survey results on ERA's website.](#)



WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

These companies have joined ERA since October 2022.

REPRESENTATIVES

- Bager of Southern California**
Jake Tramel
Southern California
bagersales.com
- Lorenz Sales, Inc.**
PJ Lorenz
Spirit of St. Louis
lorenzsales.com
- Neutronics Solutions**
Joe Lazzara
Canada
neutronics.ca
- QualSpec**
Tod DeGray
Southern California
qualspec.net
- Quantum Sales, Inc.**
Malcolm Wood
Canada
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Matt Cordell
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Matthew Boudiette
dialightsignalsandcomponents.com
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Curt Bakken
e-switch.com
- ECS, Inc., Intl.**
Eric Slatten
ecsxtal.com
- EDAC, Inc.**
Kobie Samuels
edac.net
- Excel Cell Electronic (USA) Corp.**
Lewis Ang
ece-usa.com

- Flextech Electronics Co., Ltd.**
Morgan Szu
flextech.com/tw
- Goford Semiconductor**
Sandy Wang
gofordsemi.com
- HARWIN**
Jessica Knight
harwin.com
- Heale Mfg. Co., LLC**
J. Michael Frederick
healemfg.com
- IGNION**
John Carpenter
ignion.io
- ITT Cannon**
Rick Catoe
ittcannon.com
- Jauch Quartz America, Inc.**
Neil Floodgate
jauch.com
- KEL Corp**
Satoshi Fuhiura
kel.jp
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Scott Lewis
leadertechinc.com
- LEDtronics, Inc.**
Shaan Lodhie
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Edward D. Corneau
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Tim Wolfe
maglayersusa.com
- Major League Electronics**
Neil Coffman
mlelectronics.com

- Micro Commercial Components (MCC)**
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mccsemi.com
- NEXCOM USA**
Cindy Lin
nexcom.com
- Nidec Copal Electronics, Inc.**
Robert "Bob" Wanless, II
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- NVZN Labs**
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MaryAnn Pearson
tempoautomation.com
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An Pham
unigen.com
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- Simcona Electronics Corp.**
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- Zephyr Technologies**
Kia Mostaghimi
zephyr-t.com

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- Executive Searches: Carla Mahrt**.....402-721-6590
- Legal: Adam Glazer**.....312-648-2300
- Rep & Mfr. Services: Bryan Shirley, CPMR**... 267-620-6000
- Rep Network Mgmt.: Cesare Giammarco**....401-595-7331
- Sales/Business Strategy: Craig Conrad**.....817-917-8268
- Sales/Marketing Strategy: Steve Cholas**.....949-413-1732
- Sales Consulting/ Coaching: John Simari**.....214-325-4117

ERA Services & Resources

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- ERA HoverMap - An Online Directory of Manufacturers' Reps
- Lines Available Service
- ERA Water Cooler Industry Discussions
- ERA Talks (Podcast)
- ERA Member Surveys
- ERA Bulletin Board
- POS Reports & SBLC Alerts
- ERA Logos

ERA White Papers & Industry Standards

(Visit ERA.org for details.)

- The Solution to Cost-Effective Sales Coverage is Hiding in Plain Sight
- Staying on Course – Tips for More Effective Manufacturer/ Representative Quarterly Meetings
- Rep to Manufacturer Communication: Reinforcing the Mutual Value
- Introduction to Manufacturers' Reps
- Line Conflicts: Navigating to a Mutually Beneficial Resolution
- Thriving on Change 2014: How the Field Sales Function Keeps Evolving
- Guidelines to Planning a Territory Visit
- Developing New Markets with Professional Field Sales Reps
- POS – Recommended Technical Standards for Distribution Point-of-Sale Reporting
- Split Influence (Commission) Recommendations for the Electronics Industry
- Split Commission Request Form, in Excel format

ERA Meetings & Programs

- ERA Annual Conference** Feb. 26-28, 2023
- ERA Annual Board Meeting** March 1, 2023
- EDS Leadership Summit**..... May 16-19, 2023

ERA XCOM DIGEST

While there may be some ambiguity around the permanence of the shift to remote work, most bets are on the hybrid workstyle for the near term. Our company has adopted a hybrid workstyle, and our office lease term expiring in mid-2023 presents an opportunity for us to reconsider our needs. If we require fewer employees to be on-site each day, should we make the long-term decision to jettison a portion of our office space and save money? If so, what should we look for in the next office lease?

We are reconsidering what we believed about a traditional office space. We thought an office full of employees supported employee collaboration and productivity. But now we are very adept at interacting via technology. Shouldn't the investment in new technology we made during the pandemic pay off somehow? We find ourselves screen sharing in video calls even while we are in the office together.

We thought a full office helped to build relationships, teamwork and company culture. Unfortunately, this is hard to measure and subject to debate. We have successfully onboarded two new hybrid employees since the start of the pandemic. We also thought that a large office was an extension of our brand and projected permanence and financial stability. While that may have been true in the past, many of our principals and customers work remotely or have downsized office space themselves.

With this in mind, we are embracing a new office space ideal. "Right-sizing," if you will. We require less square footage for employee offices or workstations, but the space needs to be flexible to accommodate hybrid schedules and semi-private to ensure focus and productivity. For us, partners/officers still require full-time offices. A large conference room and kitchenette have become more important than ever, since hosting impromptu meetings, lunches and business reviews are reasons people come into the office. We still need room for IT equipment, literature and promotional materials. All things considered, we can reduce our square footage requirement somewhat, but not as much as we expected.

The location of the office remains of utmost importance, even without giving much weight to employee commutes. We benefit from being near other firms

and workers and certain amenities such as upscale retail stores and restaurants. For entertainment, we desire an area that connects people, coffee houses, bars, food and fun. Airports, highways and long-distance transport access remain essential. For these reasons, we are choosing to remain in a denser urban/suburban location.

We gave some consideration to co-working centers. The one we toured had amenities including a deli, receptionist, gym, postal area, a large conference room and access to other co-working locations. However, the use of the conference room and amenities came at a cost premium. Also, the private offices were quite small and not what we were used to. There are plenty of reps who are very happy with co-working centers, but for us it was not a fit.

We toured multiple commercial spaces in our desired location but were unable to find one that met our ideal. Most required a build-out to create flexible workspaces for hybrid employees. The cost of a build-out added to the moving costs and did not offset the savings in rent from less square footage as much as expected. We also found that spaces in the smaller size range are more highly coveted than before, allowing the landlord to propose a higher cost per square foot. With all that said, we are renegotiating a short-term lease with our current landlord and plan to stay put for another 1-2 years.

The current challenge of excess office space will incentivize landlords and developers to be creative and transform offices into spaces that better accommodate a hybrid workstyle. New offices will provide amenities and collaborative spaces that entice employees and visitors to gather, exchange ideas and enjoy some occasional recreation. ■

INDUSTRY UPDATE

Kingsland Coombs, CPMR, CSP
Control Sales, Inc.
Sr. Vice President at Large
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The office quandary:
What is the right size?



REP UPDATE

Cameron English, CPMR
English Technical Sales
Sr. Vice President/Industry
cenglish@englishsales.com

A critical pivot in 2023



As we enter 2023, we are witnessing first-hand the development of never-seen-before economic variables. As manufacturers’ representatives, we are in the unique position to use these changes to our advantage. Life as we know it in the next few years will be more volatile in every aspect of the economy than at any time in the economic history of the global economy. One of the inherent strengths and structure of the rep business is what I would call the “hyper flex” – the ability ingrained in us as entrepreneurs to adapt to changes faster than any other business model.

In the book, “The Big Pivot,” Andrew Winston writes about how business needs to anticipate the impact of climate change and its global impact in order to create a more sustainable economy. Winston points out that climate, population explosion and a myriad of other issues, demand that scarcity push business organizations to consider prioritizing environmental and social challenges as central to business success or failure. Add in the potential for lockdowns, the massive spending of world governments, hyper-inflation, societal unrest in major cities and the model becomes anything but a predictable model.

I don’t know how to predict the impact of these unprecedented macro issues. What I do know is that more than any other business structure, field sales representatives can use our flexibility and autonomy to make fast and correct decisions to thrive in these uncertain times.

Breaking that down to the sales process, and further narrowing the focus to the representative function, I am confident representatives worldwide can stand out as examples of why our model can outperform institutional, centralized direct sales organizations.

First, as reps, we don’t focus on factors that are out of our sphere of influence. Another way to put it: we are like the free radicals in an open system, able to move and shift to where the need or opportunity is greatest. Think of Lyft/Uber and Airbnb, both transformational business strategies that resulted in greater supply and more efficient products and services than the traditional model. These business models prospered because they were open-market, and positioned closer to the customer need.

For example, in my company, we recently challenged each of our field sales managers to submit an overview on which OEM customers and targets would be the most likely candidates to be “recession-proof” technology accounts. As we each presented our selections, and defended our choices, a common thread started to emerge in regards to the vertical markets that appeared to have possible recession-proof potential – medical, UAV, BEV-FCV, green energy and charging, utility grid sustaining technology, A.I., satellite communications, military and electronic warfare, to name a few. These are just a few examples that our team envisioned having long-term growth, despite economic cooling.

Proof of life, despite the trends of rising inflation, money supply crashing, and other economic choke variables, were looked at from a perspective of opportunity and not scarcity. I recognized that our field sales managers were in a unique position to see where resources were flowing the strongest, and to which electronic technology sectors. These frontline professionals make daily decisions about what accounts show the most promising return for their time, talent and resources.

To further this effort, we realized that the emphasis had to be on tapping into new projects. It became apparent that the rate of change of where business is sourced is happening faster than ever in the history of the company.

The bottom line is we knew we had to transform into business development managers. No longer was the focus simply on account or territory management. Accounts and territories are adapting and shifting faster than we ever imagined.

In order to embrace this change, we developed a simple outline, which would become our new “job focus model.”

Account development strategies

Research the company

- How our company’s lines have value to the technology the customers use
- What the technology benefit is (the value proposition) to be promoted to the customer

Benjamin Franklin said, “An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.”

When you dissect that quote, what word stands out to you first? Is it the word investment? Do we only invest in the form of money? In 2023, where do you plan to find the best return on your investment? The stock market? A new manufacturer? We analyze financial reports, rising interest rates, market trends and emerging technologies – edge computing, energy storage, thermal dissipation, 6G, etc. – all this takes knowledge and is factored into the decisions we make from the data we collect.

Or is the investment in people and companies? As you research your needs and talents as a person and a company, where will 2023 take us? A new position at the same company? A new co-worker or manager? We search for the best way to develop our own skills and the skills of those around us. We learn how to succeed with a hybrid workforce and different generations. We listen to all that is presented on podcasts, in books and from speakers, and apply it to keep moving forward.

The investment is always rooted in the time allowed to gain more knowledge in whatever subject we choose. We have all learned we have a finite amount of time and we continue to squeeze as much into those minutes as we can. My latest listen/read is a book about the benefits of solitude – “Lead Yourself First” by Michael Erwin, a former Army Special Forces West Point grad. This can lead to clearer thoughts and creativity. We need as much creativity as we can find from ourselves through our experiences, or from the ERA NEXGEN members who bring their fresh perspectives to an ever-changing industry. I am always challenging myself to “think outside the box” and it takes a lot of vulnerability to make those moves, but when we execute on

"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."
-Benjamin Franklin

something where our passion shows, the time is well spent.

Benjamin Franklin was an American leader who not only co-authored the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and the Treaties of Paris but we know

him as the pioneer of electricity, and where would electronic representatives be without electricity? I also learned another fun fact about Benjamin Franklin – he invented bifocals. How many of us would be struggling to see our potential without bifocals, now or in the future? His simple quote took me down some rabbit holes and I reflect on a few of them as I join my industry partners in Austin, Texas, knowing the 2023 ERA National Conference (and especially the breakouts) will give me the knowledge that leaves me energized and challenged to meet 2023 with vim and vigor! ■

EDUCATION UPDATE

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The investments we'll make in 2023



DISTRIBUTION UPDATE

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A new year! Looking forward, and thoughts while shaving



» 2022 has come to an end, in a much different way than it began. How will the year 2022 be remembered by the electronics components industry? Will it be the year of continued supply chain problems? Will constant cost increases be our takeaway? How many missed deliveries occurred?

» Something that keeps me awake at night is whether distributors with valuable on-hand inventory will experience a serious dilemma if suppliers reduce their standard costs in the future. That could negatively impact distributors who have committed to inventory, unless the suppliers offer price protection.

» I am genuinely looking forward to hearing Michael Knight speak at the 2023 ERA Conference. Michael has committed himself to researching, analyzing and providing written and verbal presentations on the state of our industry, future technology and the economic factors that impact our businesses. He does all of this on his own, and always delivers a memorable and thought-provoking presentation at the ERA Conference. I am betting the house that this year will be another great success.

» With the challenges of the past three years, many have predicted that companies may be negatively impacted. Factors that could become reality are cash flow concerns for under-funded companies, possible limited revenue stream for start-up companies, and possibly even a change in management commitment for some organizations. I watch for mergers and acquisitions to increase as a possible indicator of this impact.

» It seems as though for some component suppliers, new product introductions (NPI) have slowed down due to a number of factors, such as reduced research and development (R&D) spending by OEMs and the component manufacturers themselves, inability of OEM customers to start redesign efforts, reduced in-person meetings by OEM customers with salespeople and redeployment of design engineers away from NPI and on supply chain issues. All of these should go away and drive a

resurgence of NPI in 2023.

» How did we exist before LinkedIn? It has definitely become a great tool for our industry and certainly almost all organizations. No plug for it, but it definitely helps us all keep current with each other and with what is going on. I am always somewhat amazed at all the content that I see on it every day. And ERA's own Walter Tobin provides great comment and insight every day. I am trying to learn from Walter.

» Is the on-hand inventory in the distribution channel at an all-time high? That is the result as distributors have reacted to the extended lead time, missed deliveries and increased demand from customers to build inventories. While it is a byproduct of the recent business cycle, this will impact component suppliers, OEM and CEM customers, manufacturers' reps and of course, the distributors. The negative could impact some suppliers as distributor orders grew in the past three years and there could be some moderation during 2023. But it is very positive for the business as customers will be able to find available inventory and minimize much of the lead time, and supply chain issues that have occurred or that could still happen in the New Year. In addition, expediting and premium freight costs will be reduced, and rescheduling and order adjustments from customers should be less stressful.

» It is a new year and I thank everyone for their support, good work, friendship and teamwork as part of ERA. The 2023 ERA Conference will be here soon. Scheduled for February 26- 28, 2023 in Austin, Texas, this year's conference theme of "Moving On, Moving Beyond" provides a great start to our year. I hope to see you there. ■

One of the topics that I have been thinking about that adds to the discussion of the value of a manufacturer's representative is an organized marketing and lead generation program. Since COVID, more and more reps need to show that they have value to offer their manufacturing partners far beyond the normal day-to-day contact with the customer base within their respective territories.

For the past six years, Schaffner has worked exclusively with a digital marketing and strategy firm to broaden our ability to generate more leads in new markets with new customers within the reps territory. We have been very successful working with them, and with this program. I can attribute so much of our current success to this relationship but more importantly, this relationship gives us the ability to grow our business relationships with our rep organizations. I first approached this company to help me find more sales qualified leads for our reps within their territory, knowing how hard it was for them to provide this monthly. Schaffner was able to generate many new leads and contacts for all of our reps over these past six years through a very organized digital marketing lead campaign, which has led Schaffner EMC to the primary position for EMI filters within the U.S. market.

However, now that we are firmly established, I believe that it is now the reps' turn to pump up their marketing programs locally as well and generate even more leads and new contacts through local lead generation within their own customer lists. This is a value that many manufacturers would find very attractive when looking at the rep model for future development of their products in the U.S. There is a belief by some manufacturers that this should be done by the reps. In my opinion, now is the time for rep firms to invest in local marketing programs to increase their value to their partners. It will give you the edge when looking to expand with other partners in the territory.

The best way to do this is to set up a program using many of the manufacturer's tools (brochures, white papers, datasheets,

etc.) through an organized approach – either via email campaigns, separate newsletters or mailings to the rep contact lists. These lists will only strengthen the account base and add more value to the manufacturer's contact list which, in turn, leads to new projects and new contacts within the territories.

Several of our reps have already taken the steps to add not only an organized marketing program but also have hired specific employees to manage the day-to-day marketing functions within their organizations. These reps have all embraced the idea of a rep taking on the marketing functions for their principals within their territory. They are leading the way not only in marketing efforts but also in sales and new business development. This has added the necessary extension of the Schaffner USA marketing program overall and has helped us to enhance our internal campaigns.

If you have been thinking about developing a marketing program for your rep firm and would like to get more information, reach out to me or a fellow rep that has developed an organized marketing program. I am sure they would help explain from a rep's point of view the advantages of an organized program and the additional focus from a dedicated marketing manager.

As always, if you would like to reach out to me directly, please do not hesitate to email me at ken.bellero@schaffner.com or give me a call 732-910-1717 anytime. ■

MANUFACTURING UPDATE

Ken Bellero
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Digital marketing program gives reps the edge manufacturers are looking for



The Glass Ceiling Project: Improving our industry by learning & growing together as allies



by Robert Derringer

Robert Derringer is a 35-year industry veteran currently employed as director, global channel, for Crouzet North America and he recently chaired the ECIA Executive Conference. Robert gained extensive experience working with reps when he had national sales responsibility with Dialight Corp. Robert managed product management, customer service and marketing efforts at companies such as Amphenol RF, LEDiL, Hirschmann of America and Aries Electronics and worked in distribution for three years as vice president of supplier development for Waldom Electronics.

Have you ever been in a meeting, at a conference roundtable, at dinner, or on social media, when someone says something a bit unsettling? Then, another person adds a comment or makes an attempt to be funny. You might even notice the conversation degrade as others join in.

Have you ever left one of those interactions and said to yourself, “I should have spoken up?” Or, maybe, you approached someone you noticed that was visibly affected by the conversation and offered your support? Have you ever promised yourself to “do better” next time?

If you answered yes to any of the last three questions, The Glass Ceiling Project (TGCP) was created with you in mind. TGCP is currently a private LinkedIn group – a place for men and women to come together to advance ways that men can “do better” to help shatter the glass ceiling that limits so many women, people of color and other groups underrepresented within the business and professional world. There is roughly equal gender representation within the group.

In a world of influencers, TGCP’s aim is to be influential and impactful, helping male allies find and confidently use their voice to effect change. The group aims to:

- Proactively use our individual voices to dispel misogynistic/racist/insensitive statements
- Learn how to “call in” rather than “call out”
- Lean on one another for advice and guidance
- Provide mentoring and skills training

Societal change accelerates when those in power are allies to those seeking just and fair opportunity. The group’s purpose is to actively influence dialogue and actions, rather than sitting passively on the sidelines to root for the underdog.

While I take pride in a continuing and successful 30+ year career in sales management in the electronics components and industrial automation industries, I have not always been the type of colleague, ally or leader that TGCP aims to create. When given the opportunity to manage western region sales for Aries Electronics in 1988, I was a driven but arrogant white male who expected everyone to adapt to my style. My own insecurities would often find me saying things to gain attention, and I was not above

making jokes about one’s gender, sexual preference, religion, ethnicity, age, weight – you name it. If I could get a laugh, I said it, and to those who took offense my attitude was, “Get over it, it’s only a joke.”

It would be several years until I began to understand that many who laughed at my jokes were, in fact, not laughing with me but instead laughing at me. And, while I was always aware of the high concentration of white males in the industry, it took me many years to come to realize the many benefits conferred

to me simply by default as a white male.

The path to the creation of TGCP contains several epiphany moments. One of the earliest was as a parent of an adopted mixed-race child. I remember reading Dr. Seuss’ “The Cat in the Hat” to my son, Garrett, and wondering how he saw Sally and Conrad in Dr. Seuss’ fifty books (98 percent of the characters were white and no girls or women of color appeared in these books).¹ I started to notice the tendency of so many films to feature white people in leading roles and people of color in supporting roles or, worse, disproportionately as villains, criminals or thugs.

As time progressed, I learned to moderate my language and become more aware of how my words and actions were perceived by others (white men, too). I’m still learning – the day I stop learning will be the day I stop



Sally and Conrad, characters in The Cat in the Hat, Dr. Seuss, 1952

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breathing. However, many comedy routines and jokes are no longer funny to me; not from some sense of political correctness, but instead because humor at the expense of another is simply no longer humorous to me.

I’m a big believer in the concept of discomfort fostering growth. I try to challenge myself to view situations from a different perspective when I feel uncomfortable. It is often when I confront those uncomfortable feelings that I’ve grown personally and professionally. *Harvard Business Review* featured a great article on this concept several years ago titled, “If You’re Not Outside Your Comfort Zone, You Won’t Learn Anything”² – thanks to Mel Foster Company’s Mike Swenson for the recent and timely share on LinkedIn.

As I continue to focus more thought and intention around matters of social justice to help create a world where people are afforded the same opportunity as I’m afforded, there’s a story I’ll share that leads me to where I am today. Several years ago, I held a position on an industry conference planning committee and I lobbied for a local sociology professor to speak on diversity and inclusion at this conference. I held the view that women, and particularly women of color, were far and away the most credible to speak to the lack of diversity in our industry. I was tremendously disappointed when the committee passed on my suggestion.

While I continued to hold this view for several years, I started to challenge myself to take unconventional or uncomfortable positions. For instance, when leadership would map out a business process and say things like, “He gets the order, she enters the order,” I would ask, why are we automatically putting the man in the selling position and women in the administrative position? Or, when colleagues would mock the pronunciation of a colleague of Mexican heritage’s name, I stopped the conversation and asked how it would feel if their names were mocked.

I began to realize that I, too, have something to say alongside women and people of color. As a white male eligible for an AARP card, my voice lands differently than the voice of the underrepresented. Just as ERA member rep companies offer synergistic product lines that offer solutions to OEMs, ODMs, CEMs and more, The Glass Ceiling Project complements the efforts of other industry associations that are working to develop a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce within the electronics components and industrial automation industries.

While there is ample research indicating that a diverse workforce fosters innovation³, when self-proclaimed misogynist Andrew Tate is said to be the favorite influencer among those under 18 years of age⁴, more voices are needed. Our daughters and granddaughters deserve better. And, if this old dog can learn new tricks, I’m convinced there’s other old dogs in our business who would like to make a difference and leave our industry a better place than before. If you’re interested in learning more about The Glass Ceiling Project, feel free to reach me at robert.derringer@crouzet.com or on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/robertderringer/>. ■

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Premium financing – An inexpensive means of purchasing life insurance



by Bruce E. Bell, CPA/Attorney

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The ownership of life insurance is a much-needed component of business succession and personal financial plans. Life insurance needs vary from funding needed to purchase the ownership interest of a business partner upon death, creating liquidity for the family of a decedent for the payment of estate taxes or providing cash for surviving family members. In many cases, the purchase of permanent insurance is needed rather than term insurance where the coverage will lapse after some period of time. Despite the need for insurance coverage, many prospective purchasers elect not to purchase much-needed whole life insurance coverage and either opt to purchase less expensive term insurance or refrain from purchasing insurance altogether.

Prospective insurance purchasers should consider some of the available means of premium financing to procure the necessary coverage. Financing premiums for life insurance purposes has become an increasingly popular technique, particularly in a low interest rate environment. One means of premium financing is to utilize a third-party lender to finance premiums. This allows a prospective insured to purchase a policy with borrowed funds, thereby leaving portfolio assets intact for future growth and income. By not liquidating portfolio investments, insurance can be purchased without incurring the income tax cost that will arise on the sale of appreciated portfolio assets. Although interest rates have increased in recent months, rates are still relatively low from an historical perspective and will not prevent premium financing from serving as an effective insurance purchasing tool.

In a premium financing arrangement, an insured creates a trust to become the owner of a life insurance policy on his or her life. The trust arrangement is necessary so that the policy proceeds will not be subject to estate taxes at the insured’s death. The policy must be a whole life insurance policy or some other type of policy that has a cash value component; a term life insurance policy that has no cash buildup within the policy will not provide sufficient collateral for, nor a means

of repaying, the loan to the lender. A bank or other institution will loan funds to the trust for the payment of policy premiums. The trust in turn pledges the policy to the bank to secure the premium advances although other collateral may be utilized as the lender may permit. The trust must pay the interest charges on an annual or more frequent basis to the bank, but the interest payments on the outstanding loan will be far less than the premium payments themselves. After a sufficient number of years have lapsed and there is a meaningful amount of cash value accumulated in the policy, the trust can borrow or otherwise withdraw cash from the policy and use the funds received to repay the lender. The policy will continue in force and the policy proceeds will be payable upon the insured’s death. The insured will essentially have financed insurance payments and only paid interest charges to maintain the policy without liquidating investment assets for premium payments.

A classic third-party premium financing arrangement is generally available only to individuals who are purchasing significant amounts of insurance on their lives. A variation of this technique, however, may be more desirable for those individuals who are not purchasing insurance in an amount large enough to attract the interest of a third-party lender. A prospective insurance purchaser with a portfolio of securities can take a margin loan from the insured’s investment portfolio and self-finance the premiums by transferring the borrowed funds to the trust holding the insurance policy which are needed for premium payments. In this case, the trust need not and should not pledge the policy to the insured/lender to secure the repayment to avoid having the insurance proceeds taxed to the insured’s estate at death. The end result is the same as with a third-party lender; the insured has procured insurance coverage without liquidating portfolio assets and incurring income taxes on the sale of appreciated securities in the insured’s portfolio.

One of the concerns with any self-financed

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premium arrangement is the large amount of transfers which must be made to the insurance trust each year for premium payments. Annual transfers or gifts made to the trust to enable the trust to pay premiums are gifts which utilize some portion of the insured’s estate and gift tax exemption, which shelters the amount of the insured’s assets which are subject to transfer taxes. As an alternative to gifting premiums to the insurance trust, the insured can loan money to the trust which the trust can utilize to pay the policy premiums. The loan must bear interest at a market rate and interest should be paid to the insured each year. If the insurance trust does not pay the annual interest charge, the foregone interest payments will constitute gifts which may utilize a portion of the insured’s transfer tax exemption. Even in that case, however, the reportable income from the insured’s forgiveness of the interest payment will be far less than the gift of the premiums. One advantage of private premium financing is that the loan need only bear interest at the IRS rate of interest which is substantially less than the market rate of interest a conventional lender will charge.

Regardless of which variation of premium financing arrangement is used, there are risks to the arrangement. A rise in interest rates can make it more expensive to finance the premium payments. Similarly, a meaningful decrease in the value of portfolio assets may require more capital to be contributed to the portfolio to sustain an existing margin loan. Problems may also arise if the policy does not perform as expected and the loan cannot be repaid as originally scheduled.

One way to view premium financing is to compare the alternative of paying insurance premiums out of pocket with the purchase of insurance with borrowed funds. An insured who pays the insurance premiums is out of pocket for the full amount paid each year. On the other hand, an insured who borrows the funds is only out of pocket for the interest cost each year. Considering that the loan is not repaid with the insured’s own funds but from the policy cash build up, most individuals having long-term insurance needs will opt for financing the insurance with borrowed funds.

Various circumstances call for the purchase of whole life insurance. A properly structured financing arrangement can provide an inexpensive means of paying insurance premiums that does not require the liquidation or use of other personal assets. ■

MARKETING GROUP DIGEST

MATERIALS, ASSEMBLY, PRODUCTION & SUPPLY

Troy Gunnin - Sun Rep, Inc. - Tampa, Fla.

Shifting tides

As we move into 2023, we look back at last year and reflect on what went wrong and what went right. Then we wrestle with how to learn from the past and best apply it to the upcoming year.

As we emerged from the pandemic, some of the things remain with us. There was a major shift to e-commerce and working from home became somewhat of a norm. Supply chain problems caused major disruption, resulting in shortages of materials and rising prices from gas and groceries to automobiles and housing. A few things of note: 1) More stores opened than closed in 2022 with vacancy rates the lowest in 15 years; 2) Inventories spiked during the pandemic and now companies find themselves awash in excess inventory; 3) Peak season for retailers – think “Black Friday” – has largely disappeared as an annual rite of passage; and 4) Investment in cloud technology went from \$145 billion in 2017 to about \$397 billion in 2022, largely fueled by the increased need from more remote work environments.

What does this mean to us? Well, we see rising interest rates, inflation and the fear of a recession. How do we cope in the age of “e-everything” and “I want it right now?” Maintain, as close as possible, a timely and best assessment of our customers and principals’ expectations relative to our markets. Try to see as far in advance as possible the trends and shifts in the market and focus on functioning in and improving our service in the new reality of today’s marketplace.

I leave you with a couple of quotes.

“All great changes are preceded by chaos.” - Deepak Chopra

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, not the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change.”

-Charles Darwin

Stay positive, open to change and enjoy the ride. It’s going to be an interesting and challenging year. ■

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Using a contract breach to defend against a sales rep’s claim for breach of contract



By Adam J. Glazer
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Some sales rep cases turn on persnickety contract language or ambiguous terms. Other rep cases involve arcane questions of law. Then there’s the case brought by sales rep Lindsie Williamson that worked its way up to the Supreme Court of Utah in November 2022.

That the defense to the claim devised by her principal was even taken seriously is a testament to the great patience of the Utah judiciary.

The background

As alleged in her complaint, filed in Provo, Utah, Williamson represented MGS by Design, Inc., per a verbal agreement starting in 2016. Although she repeatedly requested a written contract, MGS never complied.

MGS did maintain written standard sales prices, payment schedules and commission rates applicable to sales reps, including Williamson, and commission payments were previously made pursuant to the terms found in these written documents. However, from January to August 2018, Williamson sold more than \$300,000 in goods and services for MGS, and earned over \$32,000 in commissions that went unpaid.

In her suit, Williamson invoked the Utah Sales Representative Commission Payment Act, which, like many state rep statutes, enables the potential recovery of three times the unpaid commissions, plus attorney’s fees and costs. On very unusual grounds, MGS moved to dismiss the complaint (spoiler: “unusual” = absurd).

MGS seeks to exploit the Utah rep statute

Agreements between sales reps and principals are required by Utah’s rep statute to be in writing (“[t]he business relationship between a sales representative and a principal shall be in a writing signed by both the principal and the sales representative”).

Meanwhile, a separate section of the statute authorizes reps to bring claims for a failure by the principal to comply with “any provision of an agreement relating to the payment of commissions.”

Even though it was MGS that refused to reduce her agreement to writing, MGS still responded to Williamson’s complaint by arguing the absence of a written agreement served to excuse it from the rep statute’s treble damages provision. It moved to dismiss Williamson’s complaint,

actually arguing that she was not entitled to statutory relief because the “agreement” referenced in the statute must be in writing for the court to entertain Williamson’s claim and the parties’ contract was only verbal.

Surprisingly, the district court in Provo somehow bought this interpretation of the statute and granted the motion. Williamson then appealed to the Supreme Court of Utah.

The rep statute gets a fresh look on appeal

At the state’s highest court, the statute received a much more careful read. Because the term “agreement” is not defined in the statute, the court looked to its “ordinary and usually accepted meaning” as a “mutual

understanding between two or more persons about their relative rights and duties regarding past or future performances.” Nothing here suggested an agreement must be in writing.

As it did in the lower court, MGS reasoned that the separate section of the statute requiring rep contracts to be in writing should carry over to the operative section, meaning its breach of the contractual requirement to furnish Williamson with a written contract should provide an escape hatch from her suit. MGS sought a ruling that claims for a failure to comply with “any provision of an agreement relating to the payment of commissions” can only be brought if the agreement is in writing.

Fortunately, this argument was squarely rejected.

“MGS conflates the definition of ‘business relationship’ with this separate writing requirement,” wrote the court. This was a separate provision of the statute, and there was no indication that the Utah legislature intended to prevent sales reps from asserting claims without a written agreement.

Again, in the words of the court: “Just because the parties fail to reduce their relationship to a signed writing in compliance with the writing requirement does not mean that no relationship exists. We decline to incorporate the Act’s writing requirement into the definition of ‘business relationship’ where the legislature chose not to define it that way.”

MGS’s other arguments get summarily rejected

After its primary position failed decisively, perhaps it was no surprise that the court made short work of MGS’s secondary arguments. Pointing to the Utah statute’s treble damages provision, MGS suggested that due to the “hefty penalty” for not making timely commission payments, “it makes sense that the legislature wanted the business relationship between the two parties to be in writing.”

Of course, nothing in the statute supported MGS’s view of what “makes sense.” Further, the court found more sense in Williamson’s argument that if recovering treble damages was conditioned on a written contract, then principals could “sidestep liability” for such damages when they wrongfully withhold commissions simply by refusing to enter into a written deal.

Finally, the court had no difficulty rejecting the MGS argument that the statute should be “harmonized” by reading the writing requirement together with the treble damages section. Finding no harmony problem, the Utah high court made clear: “The Act can, in one section, require business relationships to be in writing, while also holding principals accountable for their promises where there is no writing.”

Conclusion

Consistent with most common-sense approaches – even if not MGS’s – a statutory requirement for parties to reduce their contract terms to writing does not furnish cynical principals with a trick door to use to avoid the treble damages made available by the same statute for failing to timely commission a sales rep. Like most non-paying principals, MGS would have to answer for its unfair treatment of a highly performing sales rep. ■

In the words of the court, "Just because the parties fail to reduce their relationship to a signed writing in compliance with the writing requirement does not mean that no relationship exists."

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EXECUTIVE COMMENTARY: The upside-down world

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growth by making it cheaper for businesses and consumers to borrow money to pay for things like office equipment and new cars. Super news! Lower interest rates make it easier for all of us to invest in our businesses and in our personal lives, buy homes with low mortgage rates and obtain lower credit card interest. All good, right?

Hold on there! Low interest rates can also potentially encourage overspending and unwise investment, leading to unproductive economic activity and inflation.

Yet – higher interest rates also reward folks who have savings/cash who can earn higher interest on CDs and other financial packages; therefore, high interest rates are good for some folks.

Yet – consumers say they feel lousy about the economy.

Yet – a record 196 million Americans went shopping over the Thanksgiving weekend — and those roaring sales numbers were a combination of people making more transactions! The economy may not be doing as poorly as we think! What’s more, Americans are traveling at pre-pandemic levels, even with higher airfare and hotel prices.

The Fed has been trying to contain the highest inflation since the 1980s, jacking up interest rates six times in 2022 and even rolling out a bumper three-quarter-point hike, not once, but four times in a row.

That means the next year will no question be a challenge as all that tightening continues to work its way through the economy.

This concludes our Economics 101 lesson from the “Upside Down.” What’s good is bad and what’s bad is good. So, what are we to do? Who do we listen to? What economic barometers can help guide us in 2023?

Trust your gut

My own personal economic models are the following:

1. How tough is it to get a parking space at the airport? If spaces are tough to get, it means a lot of folks are traveling, both for personal time and for business. Both signify a high level of confidence to spend and invest money, based on our feelings about the economy.
2. The line at the shoeshine stand at the airport – like the parking space shortage, men and women getting their shoes shined while on business travel (hence, dress shoes) indicate the level of business travel and the willingness to spend \$10 on a shoe shine. A long line means a lot of business travelers who feel good about their trip.
3. When you check in at the front desk of a hotel, ask them “How’s business?” or “Gee – the hotel looks busy. What has been the occupancy rate of the property over the last 30 days?” They will usually tell you. A high occupancy rate means a lot of folks are traveling for both work and play.

My advice is to listen to your own homegrown economic tool, your internal instinct (a.k.a. your gut!) Think about it. Look back at your own experience, your personal life and your business career. When has your gut ever been wrong? I say “never.” Where we get in harm’s way in our life is when our brain tries to outthink our gut. We analyze, agonize and rationalize. We base our decisions on more than our gut feel. We overrule our gut and vote in favor of our brain...and bam! We make the wrong decision!

Be cautious while adventurous. Seize the opportunities without overextending yourself. No matter what: capitalize on the 2023 market conditions. Run your business as you have done all these years. Trust your gut and do not try to outthink it.

Your gut is calling...do not ignore it or you will pay the price! ■

NEWS BEAT

SEE YOU AT THE 2023 ERA CONFERENCE!

The 2023 ERA Conference will be another sold-out event, with more than 600 people registered to attend, and more than 150 sponsors supporting the event. We're excited to see all of our industry colleagues in Austin, Texas, in February, where we will re-energize, learn and connect through keynote and general session speakers, breakout sessions and networking events.

View breakout session details, keynote and general sessions, speaker biographies, videos and more on the ERA Conference webpage at <https://era.org/era-conference/>.

WHITE PIN SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM: ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS

The ERA White Pin Internship program application deadline is Feb. 26, 2023. This program offers ERA-member manufacturers’ reps a chance to hire a rising college junior or senior as a summer intern, with the opportunity to have two-thirds of the internship cost subsidized. Award recipients from the Central, East and West regions of North America will be selected and announced.

This is a fantastic opportunity for the intern to gain hands-on experience in the electronics component sales industry and a great chance for rep companies to train and teach a potential hire. Read more about the program and apply today! (Visit era.org, click ERA Resources, then White Pin Internship.)

EDS SUMMIT WILL "REIGNITE" IN MAY

The EDS Leadership Summit will return to the Mirage in Las Vegas from May 16-19, 2023. ERA is proud to be a co-hosting organization of this event.

The summit provides an energized forum for representatives, manufacturers and distributors to meet and plan, discuss new opportunities and reset goals, through high-level strategic meetings, event functions and formal gatherings.

Full registration is now open. Visit edssummit.com for more information.

ERA ANNOUNCES LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENT

ERA is pleased and honored to announce that Michael J. Long, executive chairman of Arrow Electronics, Inc. has been named the 2023 recipient of the ERA Lifetime Achievement Award.

The award will be presented to Long at the 2023 ERA Conference in February, in recognition of his service to the electronics industry, manufacturers’ representatives and ERA. The Lifetime Achievement Award was created to recognize individuals who play an integral role in supporting the manufacturers’ representative model in the electronics industry.

Long is currently the executive chairman of Arrow Electronics; between 2009-2022, he served as chairman, president and chief executive officer. Before that, he was Arrow’s president and chief operating officer with responsibility for all of the company’s operations and business units.

APPLE WILL USE CHIPS MANUFACTURED IN NEW ARIZONA FACILITY

CNBC reported that Apple CEO Tim Cook said his company will be purchasing U.S.-made microchip processors from an Arizona factory owned and operated by Taiwanese company TSMC. TSMC is the biggest foundry company with over half the market share. The Arizona plant will be capable of manufacturing the 4-nanometer and 3-nanometer chips. ■



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 Carolinas ERA continues to stay connected with frequent virtual breakfast and lunch meetings covering a variety of current industry topics. In October, the 19th Annual Memorial Golf Tournament benefitting the Carolinas Electronics Representatives (CERA) Scholarship Fund was hosted at a new location, Tot Hill Farm, in Asheboro, N.C. The chapter is proud to put on this annual event, and this year had another great turnout. In December, the chapter hosted an in-person holiday networking lunch event where they discussed the topic “Findings from the Frontlines.”

CHICAGOLAND-WISCONSIN

The Chicagoland-Wisconsin chapter celebrated the holiday season by hosting a members-only happy hour social in December at The Local Kitchen + Tap located in Schaumburg, Ill. Many chapter members took advantage of this opportunity to mix and mingle while also supporting the local Toys for Tots drive. The cost of admission to the event was simply an unwrapped toy for Toys for Tots. The chapter was proud to hold this great networking event while also bringing joy to children in need.

An event in January featured an interactive, roundtable discussion with fellow reps, distributors and manufacturers on such current topics as: 2023 outlook; principal visits & expectations; coordinating new engineer meetings; and the future of field sales vs. inside sales. Attendees were encouraged to bring their own topics they wanted to discuss.

FLORIDA-SUNSHINE

The Florida-Sunshine ERA Chapter held a virtual training with the topic, “Technology Swap Shop for a New Day” in November. The training was presented by Byron Holloway of Fralia Co. & Associates. The tech swap shop offered a chance to learn about great programs, tips, shortcuts and timesavers from industry peers across the nation. This was an informative training with open dialogue discussing ways to better maximize productivity. The chapter would like to thank Byron for taking the time to present to its members.

The chapter held their 29th annual Space Coast Holiday Happy Hour and Golf Tournament in December at Duran Golf Club in Viera, Fla. The local charity chosen to benefit was Kids Without

Christmas, a charity endorsed by the Brevard County Sheriff’s office. This year’s event brought out 92 golfers and over 100 attendees for the evening prior and lunch following the tournament. Over \$10,000 in cash and toys was given to Kids Without Christmas. The chapter was thankful that ERA CEO Walter Tobin attended and gave a “state of the union” address to the gathered industry leaders. The chapter thanks each and every member of our community for their generous gifts of time, talents and in a few cases, treasures.

MINNESOTA



The Minnesota Chapter hosted their first in-person networking event of 2022 in September. Over 20 members had a fun night of socializing at Nine Mile Brewing in Bloomington, Minn.

NEW ENGLAND

The New England Chapter of ERA was proud to once again partner with Molex to sponsor an annual holiday event and Toys for Tots Drive in December. The event was held at the Four Points by Sheraton Wakefield Boston Hotel in Wakefield, Mass., and was well attended by reps, distributors and



Molex employees. Many toys were donated, and a donation was made to the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program. Thanks to all who helped make this event a great success!

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

In December, the ERA’s Northern California Chapter celebrated its 75th anniversary with a happy hour event at Puesto in Santa Clara, Calif. The event was a huge success, with over 50 reps, distributors and suppliers in attendance. The atmosphere at Puesto was festive and lively, with guests chatting and laughing as they took advantage of the discounted drinks and appetizers. The event provided a much-needed opportunity for people to connect and socialize after a year of social distancing and isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a memorable evening, and the chapter looks forward to hosting more events like this in the future and bringing together community members to celebrate and have a good time.

The chapter sponsored a “Respect in the Workplace” training via Zoom for all chapter rep members in December. It was a popular event, as the state of California requires all firms of five people or more to have sexual harassment prevention training every two years. Certified trainer Elaine Henderson presented the material in two separate online sessions targeting two groups: managers and supervisors, as well as employees. Managers and supervisors who completed the two-hour interactive training received a certificate, which can be shown to the state to prove compliance. Henderson provided a comprehensive overview of sexual harassment in the workplace, including the various forms it can take and the steps individuals and organizations can take to prevent it. She also discussed the importance of creating a safe and inclusive work environment for all employees. The event also included Q&A sessions, during which attendees could ask questions and engage with the speaker. Overall, the event was well-received, with many attendees expressing appreciation for the valuable information and resources.

The chapter hosted its annual meeting in late January at Maggiano’s Little Italy in Santa Clara, Calif., its first in-person chapter event of the year. During the luncheon, new chapter officers were announced, and the budget was presented to attendees. There was a discussion about upcoming events and other important topics. This was a great opportunity for members of the chapter to come together, network and stay informed about the organization’s plans and activities.



SOUTHWEST

The Southwest chapter was excited to host its first in-person event in their territory since the beginning of the pandemic. Members located in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area were thrilled to gather together at the Southwest Chapter ERA Happy Hour and Canned Food Drive event in November. This event was designed to bring members together and to also benefit the community by asking everyone to bring a donation for the local food bank. Members donated 99 pounds of food, as well as \$80, which was all delivered to the North Texas Food Bank – just in time for the holidays. The chapter leaders are so grateful to all members who attended this event, and especially grateful for their generosity!

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

ERA Southern California presented its 6th annual golf tournament supporting Operation Homefront in November. This yearly industry event offers a chance to socialize, learn about the value of ERA memberships and win great prizes.

In December, the chapter hosted all Southern California ERA members for an end of year planning meeting.

SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS

For the upcoming 2023/2024 years, the Spirit of St. Louis Chapter has elected new chapter officers. They are: President – Veronica Stinnette of F&H Sales; Vice President – Mark Bowers of RW Kunz & Associates; Secretary – Rich Satori of Centech, Inc.; National Delegate – Mike Long of Siptech Sales; and Treasurer – Michael McElhone of ZF Electronic Systems.

Veronica will add great value to the chapter as our new president. She has a “go-getter” attitude and will strive to make us successful over the coming years!

The chapter continued to host lunch meetings the first or second Monday of every other month. Discussions included growing our chapter with suggestions of new members, the local market and guest speakers when they are available. The chapter also hosted a Christmas dinner party and for the first time, two members from Avnet attended. The chapter wishes a happy new year to the ERA family! ■

XCOM REP UPDATE: A critical pivot in 2023

(continued from page 24)

Focus on reaching out to engineers

- References are powerful things
- Alignment with product offering to the customer
- Build rapport with engineering contacts

Connect with distributors

- Build a network
- Find a mentor
- Review P.O.S. and develop a conversation about the major activity

Review P.O.S.

- Mine for best opportunities
- Discuss with distribution

Strategies to connect

- Nothing works as well as good old-fashioned follow-up
- Get your mentor to give you guidance and travel in the field with distribution contacts
- Supply chain can often be easier to connect than engineers, and a good starting point

Use resources to farm for contacts

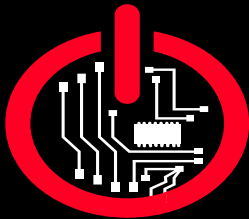
- Zoom Info can mine for key contacts and how to reach them
- Once you build/expand your list, deploy all resources to reach out
- Invest in focus/value-driven messaging. For example, “We have found great success in your technology with our capability in RF filters for radar jamming technology through this unique product from ‘XYZ’ company.” Focused and educated messaging gets results.

Although this strategy is not new to us, the emphasis on project-oriented focus is a new direction. How many of us have seen contacts moving at a more rapid rate of change, companies buying their competitors, technology changing and leaving behind prior projects faster than ever? This dynamic will continue faster than ever. In our case, we are looking at suppliers being more responsive and flexible than ever. Customer expectations are increasing in areas related to time-to-market and response time for critical information for development.

In times of great change, the organizations that can adapt will thrive. The very nature of our structure bodes well for us in volatile environments. I predict our line card, customers, suppliers and channel partners are about to go through the most disruptive dynamic we have seen in over 50 years of business.

My challenge question to my fellow representatives: How are you positioned to get ahead of the curve to pivot and thrive against all odds? ■

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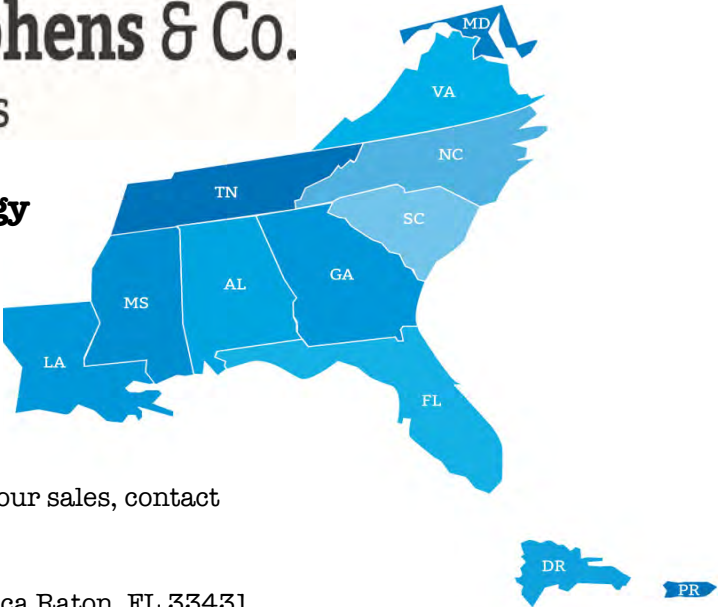
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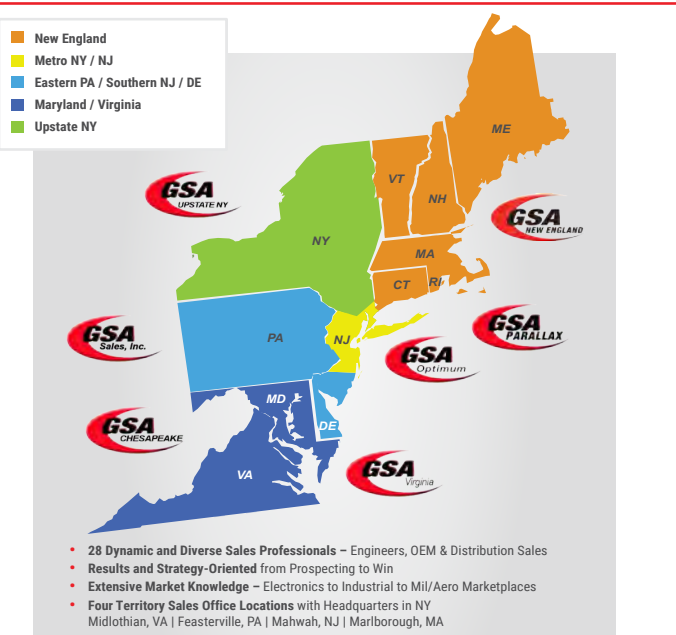
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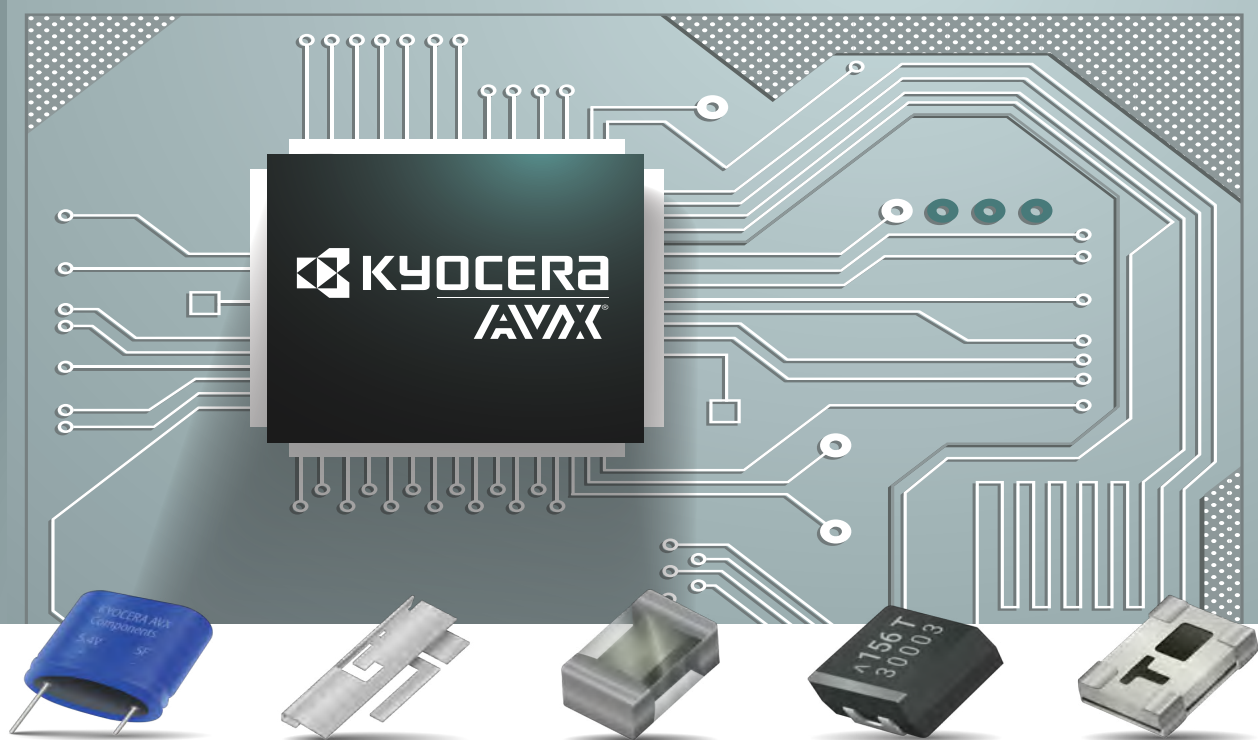


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