

a MANA resource for principals and reps

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**Keynae Agnew  
Successfully Navigated  
From Working in a  
Molecular Biology  
Lab to a Career as  
an Independent  
Manufacturers' Rep**

**Fundamentals to Key  
Account Selling**

**Manufacturers —  
a Little Knowledge  
Goes a Long Way!**

**How Meta Roles  
Boost Your Career**

**Non-Compete  
Language in  
Sales Rep  
Agreements**





# Starting (From Scratch) as a Rep

BY JACK FOSTER

A desire to make a move from working in a molecular biology laboratory to a career in sales coupled with a fortuitous recommendation from a friend was what propelled Keynae Agnew into a career as an independent manufacturers' representative.



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Keynae Agnew

According to Agnew, who was armed with a degree in biochemistry from Texas A&M University, "A little over 12 years ago a gentleman who had his own one-man rep organization mentioned to a friend of mine that he was looking to hire someone to assist with office work and if the candidate had a science background

that would be a plus. I spoke with him right away and three days later, I signed a contract to begin work as a rep."

Obviously the move from working with a contract research organization to sales necessitated the navigation of a fairly steep learning curve. "I have to admit that although I had experi-

## “I recognize that retainers or shared territorial development fees can be a source of contention between reps and principals.”

ence in lab management and customer service, I had no background in sales. I didn't know what a manufacturer's rep was. At the time of my hire, I was not aware that the gentleman who hired me had selected me to succeed him in the agency.” Fortunately Agnew explains, “My father was an entrepreneur, he encouraged me to be a self-starter and not to be afraid to take on new challenges. My new employer taught me various aspects of the rep business and helped develop my skill set through mentoring and coaching. Naturally I was more than a little nervous going out on my first sales calls but that's something all of us have to go through. I was comfortable with the financial side of the business and picking up the technical side was fairly easy for me. Basically, I was very comfortable with the job and welcomed the opportunity to learn and grow in my new career.”

### More Than Surviving Downsizing

After Agnew had worked little more than three-and-a-half years with the agency, the owner was facing some health challenges and

was forced to downsize. Part of the downsizing affected not only Agnew but the major line that she worked on. “Thankfully I had developed a good relationship with the manufacturer's vice president of sales, as well as other employees within the company. The company offered me the product line and that was the start of my own agency.”

With that as the beginning, today Agnew heads Agnew Pacific Enterprises, LLC, Aliso Viejo, California, a one-person manufacturers' representative organization selling products and laboratory instrumentation to clinical, biotech, pharmaceutical and academic research institutions. According to Agnew, “My company's goal is to provide innovative products and services which meet our clients' demand to deliver quality results for clinical diagnostics and research applications.”

The agency represents brand manufacturers which specialize in products and instrumentation for clinical diagnostics and research applications including:

- Hematology.
- Microbiology.

- Clinical chemistry.
- Cytology/histology.
- Cystic fibrosis.
- Point-of-care diagnostics.
- Veterinary.

Now firmly established as a rep, Agnew faces many of the same concerns as her peers in other industries. “Just as everyone else, I'm faced with the challenge of locating and attracting principals. Thankfully, that hasn't been a major problem as referrals from other reps and principals have been helpful in completing my line card. Memberships with trade associations have helped to attract prospective principals as well.”

When the subject of accepting or refusing pioneering work is introduced, Agnew admits that she's no stranger to those situations. “I recognize that retainers or shared territorial development fees can be a source of contention between reps and principals. I tend to look at these on a case-by-case basis.”

On top of that she admits that she's always thinking about “...hiring staff or signing on with sub-reps in order to grow the business, not to mention implementing systems and tools to streamline the business and make more efficient use of my time. Everything I think about is geared to better position my company in the market I serve.”

Then, there's the additional acknowledgement that she is a female working in a male-dominated industry. But rather than accepting that as a challenge or a problem, she looks at it as an advantage. “I work very well

### About CPMR

Keynae Agnew earned her CPMR (Certified Professional Manufacturers Representative) designation in 2017. “The process was well worth the investment and further increased my knowledge base with regard to running a professional rep agency.”

with the men I'm in contact with. Keep in mind, however, that a large number of the people that I deal with operate in the lab sector — and many of them are females. So, while there may not be many female reps, a good number of the customer contacts I have are with females.”

### **Advances in Technology**

On the subject of how advances in technology have affected her profession, Agnew explained that the major impact technology has had in her field has been more related to the products that she sells. “Tech advancements have made more tools available to the rep industry. My job is to find the tools or ‘apps’ best suited for me and the unique needs of my business.”

On a related subject, she adds,

that while the number of these tools or “apps” continue to increase, nothing will ever effectively replace face-to-face contact with customers and principals. “That can never be replaced. Remember that the relationships we depend upon have been built upon our ability to learn about each other and being able to work effectively when it comes to serving customers.”

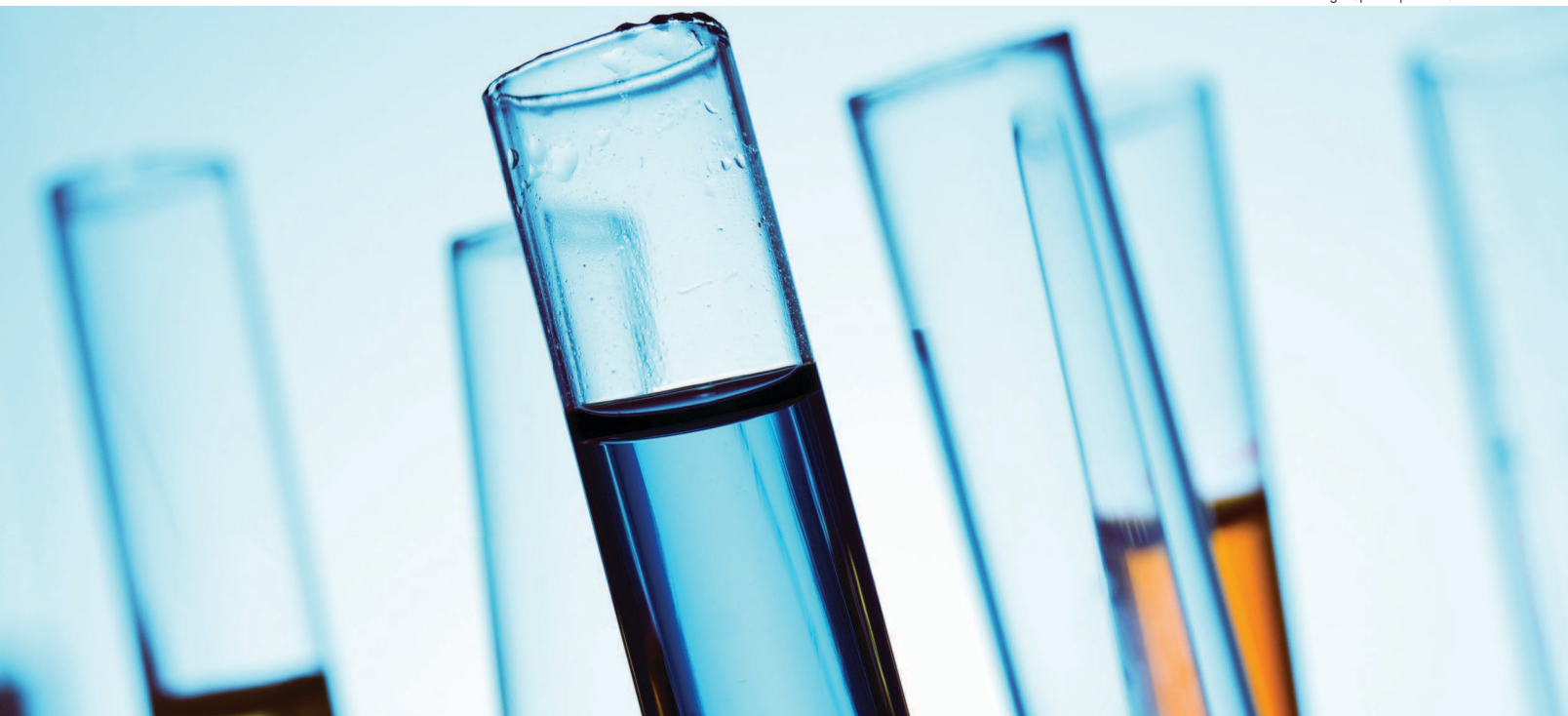
Agnew is quick to acknowledge that an integral part of her success as a rep is attributed to her membership in MANA and HIRA (Health Industry Representatives Association). “My former employer introduced me to MANA and we used resources from [www.MANAonline.org](http://www.MANAonline.org) as a part of my training. I was also sent to select MANA events as part of my ongoing education. As a result, when I

started my own business, I joined the association because I recognized the value based on my past experience. I joined to access the resources offered because I wanted to grow professionally and become successful. I made it a point to participate in MANA’s “Pathway to Rep Success” Mentoring Program within the first two years of starting my business. MANA continues to provide valuable business resources and opportunities to network. Most recently, I have enjoyed the opportunity to meet and network with other female reps in MANA’s Women’s Special Interest Group, ‘A League of Their Own’ (ALOTO).”

### **MANA’s Women’s Group**

In speaking of MANA’s Women’s Special Interest Group, Agnew added, “Through my participation in

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ALOTO, I've been able to meet face-to-face with some women here in Southern California. I also attended the WomensRep Expo last year in Florida. My experience has been that when we come together in these venues, it's easy to exchange best practices and discuss the needs of our respective businesses. We share ideas and information, and help to provide each other with solutions to common problems. There's a sense of camaraderie that develops among the women reps."

Complementing the resources of MANA, she adds that the industry-specific rep association, HIRA, has been great to work with and being a

part of that association "has given me the opportunity to network, make valuable connections and provided introductions to prospective principals within the industry I serve. I've been able to meet other reps and explore sub-rep opportunities that benefit my business. HIRA provides a unique support network specific to the needs of independent reps working in the healthcare industry."

As she looks to the future of her company, Agnew notes, "Part of planning for the future involves developing and implementing solid financial strategies to carry me through each phase of my business. My goal is to position my company

for consistent growth, expand my staff and hire additional reps so that I can take over the administrative side of the business. Working with a professional business coach/financial advisor who understands this business model has been crucial to evaluating options and developing strategies to achieve my goals. And, succession planning is an important component to the future of my business. After all, a succession plan is what opened this career path to me in the first place."

*MANA welcomes your comments on this article. Write to us at [mana@manaonline.org](mailto:mana@manaonline.org).*

**AGNEW PACIFIC ENTERPRISES**

**THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE RIGHT JOB**

Providing instrumentation to clinical, biotech, pharmaceutical and academic research institutions.

**ABOUT US**

Agnew Pacific Enterprises, LLC is a manufacturer's representative organization which sells products and laboratory instrumentation to clinical, biotech, pharmaceutical and academic research institutions. We strive to provide innovative products and services which meet with your demand to deliver quality results.

We represent brand manufacturers which specialize in products and instrumentation for clinical diagnostics and research applications.

- Hematology
- Microbiology
- Clinical Chemistry
- Cytology/Histology
- Cystic Fibrosis
- Point-of-Care Diagnostics
- Veterinary

Our independent sales agency maintains membership with two trade associations:

**MANA** Manufacturer's Representative & Distributor Association

**HIRA** Health Industry Representatives Association

**CLINICAL** **BIOTECH** **PHARMA** **ACADEMIC**