

a MANA resource for principals and reps

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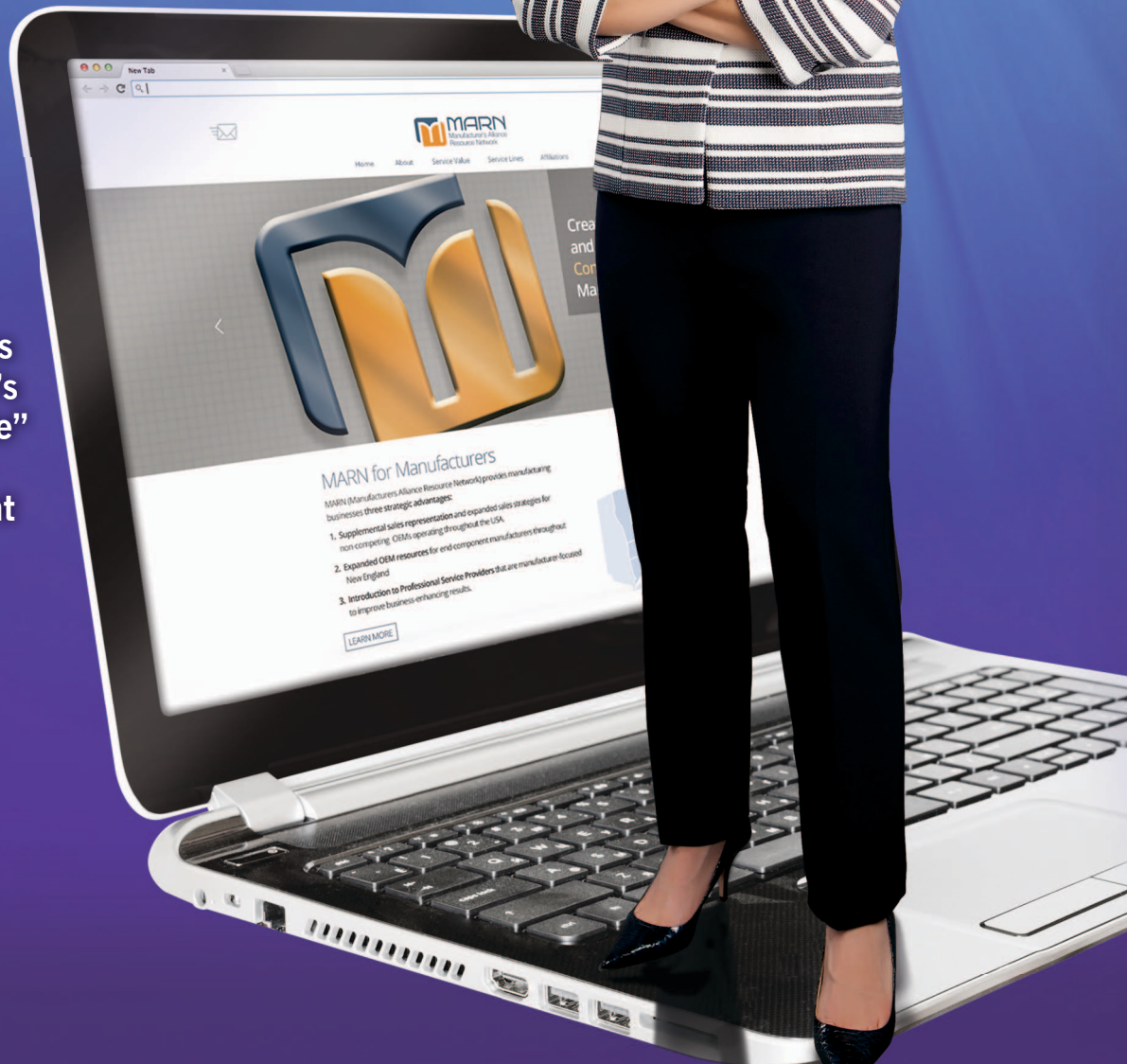
Marnee Palladino — a Passion for Building Relationships and Providing Solutions

Sitting at
Your Principal's
Planning Table

How Manufacturers
Become Their Rep's
"Emotional Favorite"

Developing Account
Strategies

Your Buyer Is
Smarter Than You



Building an Agency With MANA's Help

BY JACK FOSTER

While Marnee Palladino may not have planned to forge a career for herself as an independent manufacturers' representative, her passion for building relationships and providing solutions for individuals' problems thankfully took her in that direction.

Palladino, president of MARN, Inc. (formerly known as Factice, Inc.) Middlebury, Connecticut, today finds herself firmly positioned to meet the needs of customers and principals in the aerospace/aircraft, automotive, battery, computer, connector, defense, electronics, firearms, marine, medical, military, power generation, semiconductor, superconductor and telecommunications markets.



According to Palladino, “Following graduation from college I didn’t start out in sales. I began as a project manager for a design firm before moving on to a financial corporation. Both positions were specific to my undergraduate degree. And, after five years, I launched my own independent project management consulting firm.”

She explains that the agency business she started a little over a year ago, grew out of an entirely different experience. “After getting married in 2000, for the next 15 years I found myself living and breathing the manufacturing world of my husband’s business — Palladin Precision Products.”

Palladin Precision Products, Waterbury, Connecticut, since 1963 has been a job shop of precision-turned components.

Building Relationships

“I really loved being involved with Palladin, especially meeting with customers and prospects and learning about their requirements. It was also when working in inside sales that I became passionate about building relationships and being resourceful to people.”

She continues that it ultimately dawned on her that she could be of greater assistance to people if she was

able to offer multiple solutions to multiple problems — hence, the creation of MARN, Inc.

“Before I started my own agency, I was searching the internet for a trade organization when I found MANA’s website. The MANA website offered a wealth of information, so I immediately joined. While I was looking for information on representative agreements/contracts, I received an e-mail from Charley Cohon, MANA’s president & CEO, as follows: ‘Your name has popped up a few times on our website on rep agreements. Is there anything I can help you with?’ As I responded to say thank you, Charley provided me with the most thorough response to my questions, and he also informed me that MANA was available to support me anytime I needed.

“In the short time I have been a member, MANA has been an invaluable source of information — offering the following (and so much more):

- A very thorough reference in developing my sales agency business plan.
- A working template for a sales representative agreement.
- A critique of both of the above from MANA professionals.
- What to look for and what questions to ask when interviewing principals.



Left: Marnee Palladino (*right*) helps man a booth with Peter Sayki, SICAM, during an industry show in Foxwoods, Connecticut.

Right: Palladino demonstrates how to use a micrometer during a customer sales call.

Far right: A typical product represented by MARN was manufactured to customer specifications.

- 12 Steps to Rep Professionalism program.
- Countless phone calls with and endless encouragement from both Charley Cohon and Jerry Leth, MANA's vice president & general manager.
- Access to other professional sales representatives nationwide.
- MANA's Code of Ethics.
- A listing in the RepFinder, MANA's online directory of manufacturers' representatives.

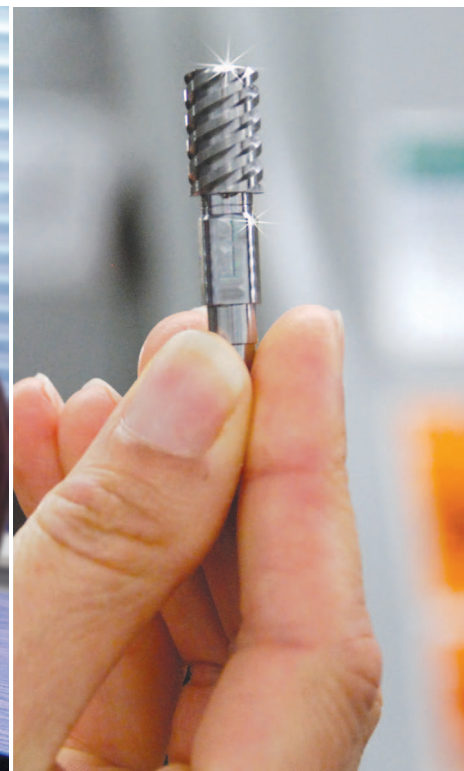
"I am and will continue to be most appreciative of the limitless resources available through MANA and its professionals!"

Research in Advance

Owing to her diligent research prior to opening her agency's doors, Palladino admits there have been rela-

tively few surprises on the path to becoming an agent — but even when something has cropped up, MANA has been of assistance. "Opening my doors and getting incorporated were time-consuming but fairly easy. If anything, however, I learned how challenging it can be to actually go to contract with a manufacturer. I was surprised how much work it was and how much time it took to negotiate and actually get to the contract stage. With my first line — my husband's company — obviously it was easy. Even with my second line, it was all very straightforward. They were very considerate and even went so far as to recommend that life of part be included in the contract. Moving forward, however, I was surprised how much legal work was involved. Some manufacturers were very supportive while others wanted me to just work with their standard form of contract.

"It was also when working in inside sales that I became passionate about building relationships and being resourceful to people."



“Thanks to MANA, I had a lot of assistance when it came to negotiating [contracts].”

Once again, thanks to MANA, I had a lot of assistance when it came to negotiating.”

A part of the negotiating process involved consideration of shared territorial development fees, she continued. “It’s interesting that during the negotiating process, some manufacturers are very understanding. They appreciate the fact that if there is no existing business in the territory, the rep is going to have to make an investment of time, money and effort to get things started. In the end they understand that there’s going to need to be a minimum level of investment on their part to bring forth new business. There are some, however, that remain hesitant because there’s no guaranteed outcome. To them I respond that it’s not the right fit for me and by the way, it doesn’t set a good example to other reps that are trying to develop business in their territories. I’ll thank them for their inquiry of my services, but I’m not afraid to walk away from potential business.”

Building a Line Card

On the subject of putting lines together, Palladino explains that she was able to achieve a couple of goals in the construction her line card. “First, I wanted to mirror Palladin as a principal line. Second, I was looking for industry diversification and synergistic product lines. As a result, if sales in one segment were down, they might very well be up in another market.”

When it comes to finding principals and having principals find her agency, she explains she used multiple approaches. “I had some success from my membership in the Connecticut Small Manufacturers Association, which allowed me to reach out to smaller manufacturers that might not have local representation. While I did find that a number of local manufacturers already had representation, MANA’s Charley Cohon and Jerry Leth were quick to advise me as to the benefits of locating principals outside my territory by attending trade shows. In addition it’s also easy to meet principals, make contacts and get to know their products by attending these shows. Jerry and Charley also acquainted me with the benefits of using the Line Locator on the MANA website.”

Just as any other independent representative — especially those with new agencies — Palladino agrees that it’s not always easy getting in to see potential customers. Her response to that challenge is to be persistent and to be appreciative of the value of the cold call. “While I don’t ever want to be considered a nuisance by calling on someone too often, I’ll be tenacious. If one level of contact doesn’t bring results, I’ll try additional levels. Sometimes I’ll make the contact, and other times I won’t, but I’ll keep on trying.”

Cold Calls Live

As for the cold calling, Palladino says that “When I opened my agency I said that I’d never rely on cold calls. They just don’t pay off. Just recently, however, I was traveling to Rhode Island and had two appointments cancel on me. I was left with traveling there to see one customer. I asked myself what I was going to do with the rest of my time. I did some research, found other companies to call on and made those cold calls. I was amazed that I came back to the office with five names at each company, and then I followed up and arranged meetings. I changed

MARN, Inc.

Middlebury, Connecticut

Marnee Palladino, President

www.marninc.com

Established: 2014

Joined MANA: 2014

TERRITORY: Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine

PRODUCTS: MARN, Inc., represents precision-turned components (Swiss and non-Swiss screw machine), stamping and wire forms, 3D print solutions, rapid tooling and prototyping, plastic injection molding, and metal finishing.

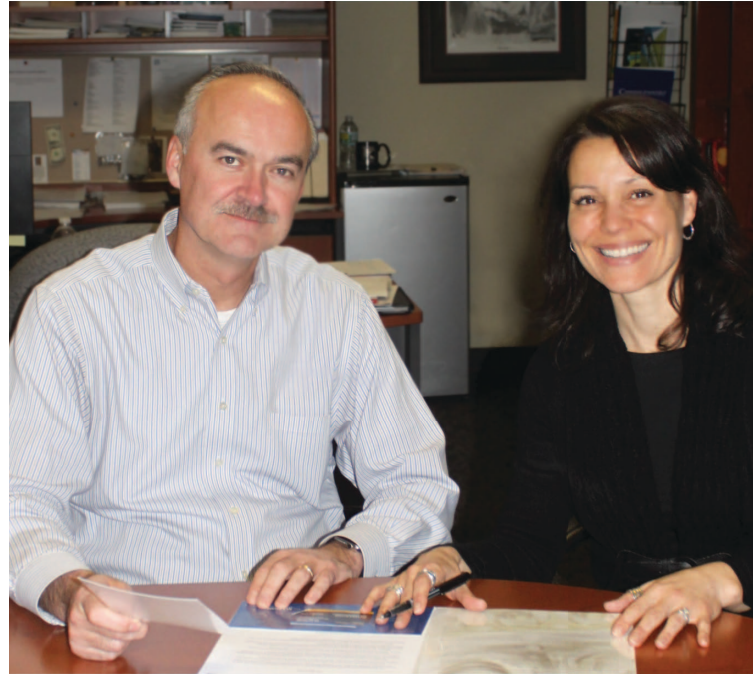
my view: cold calling is not dead. Even if I can't find the right contact in the data I have, I'll just call and say, 'This is what I provide, to whom do you think I should speak?' My view is that I offer something of value, and I want to help them."

As she surveys the business landscape she's had to navigate over the course of the last year, Palladino thinks back on the worst and best decisions she's made in the formation of her still growing business. "On the negative side, I do wish I had made more accurate estimates as to the stipends I'd require from manufacturers for developing business for them. Now that I have a feel for all my expenses, I'd be a little more accurate in what I ask for."

On the positive side, however, "The best decisions I've made have been to join MANA and to choose the lines I represent. I invested the proper amount of time and effort to get the mix correct. They're the right lines with the right support for me."

And finally, when asked if there are any concerns that keep her up at night, she is quick to respond that "Here's something that wakes me before the alarm clock every morning — am I sure that I'm able to deliver customer satisfaction in order to more than meet their expectations? So far, I'm sure the answer is 'Yes.'"

MANA welcomes your comments on this article. Write to us at mana@manaonline.org.



Marnee Palladino (*right*) meets with Doug Johnson, president of Marion Manufacturing.