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# The Benefits Of Dual-Association Membership For Reps

How does one place a value on membership in a professional association? More to the point, how do you place a value on membership in an independent representatives' association? Is it a cost? An investment? Is it worth the time, money and effort to not only pay annual dues, but then to follow up and become actively involved in the workings of the organization? And finally, what has your association done for you lately?



*Joe Miller*

The answers to these questions will probably vary depending upon whom you ask. The fact remains, however, that the rep member, or prospective member, owes it to himself to regularly evaluate what he expects from his association membership. The follow-up exercise should include an evaluation of whether he's getting a return on his investment.

To that end, it's useful to concurrently consider the rep's membership in a horizontal (MANA) and a vertical, industry-specific (NEMRA, ERA, AIM/R, PTR, etc.) association.

In the March 2003 issue of *Agency Sales*, MANA's President and CEO Joe Miller authored an article entitled, "Multiple Association Membership a Must for Professional Rep Firms." In that

article, he drew the distinction between MANA and the several Industry-Specific Rep Groups (ISRGs) that MANA considers sister associations. According to Miller, "Many ISRGs are a small special interest group of their own 'all-industry' associations that also include manufacturers and wholesale distributors. Some of the larger ones form stand-alone associations that usually lack the critical mass and budget to be effective in promoting, protecting and improving the rep profession, but they will focus on doing one of the three things well."

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## The Industry-Specific View

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He continued that "these ISRGs usually do an excellent job of promoting the profession, too,

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***“The industry-specific rep association does a great job of communicating the value of the function to two constituencies — the manufacturers and then downstream to the end-user customer.”***

within their specific-industry niche, but they tend to communicate the message to only those manufacturers and wholesalers that belong to their own industry associations.”

One of those ISRGs that Miller refers to is the National Electrical Manufacturers Representatives Association (NEMRA), headquartered in Tarrytown, New York. From his perspective as president of that association, Henry P. Bergson notes that there are a couple of points that you must focus on in the course of a discussion of horizontal and vertical rep associations.

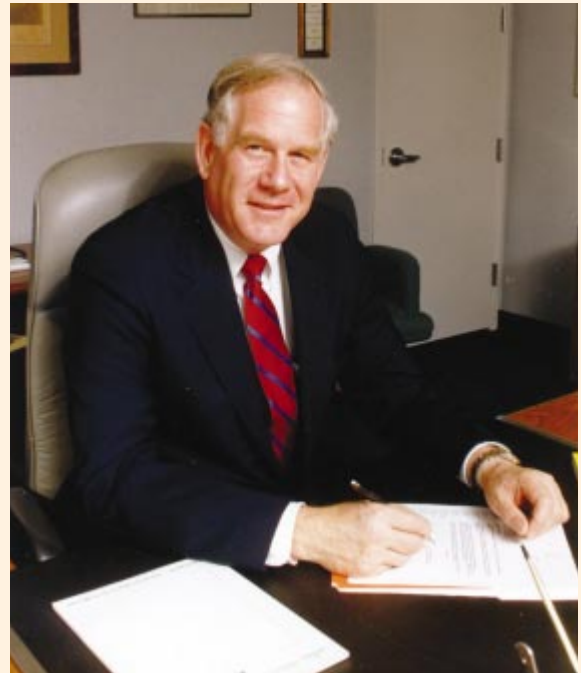
“For instance,” he explains, “if you are a rep and you hope to be a part of the electrical industry, then it’s incumbent upon you to be a member of NEMRA — and it’s true for all specific industries in which reps work. This is true for a number of reasons, not the least of which are the advocacy, access and association that such organizations provide their members.”

• **Advocacy** — When it comes to advocating the rep function to the industry in which a rep works, “the industry-specific rep association does a great job of communicating the value of the function to two constituencies — the manufacturers and then downstream to the end-user customer,”

he explains. “We (NEMRA, and other associations) provide a national promotional voice that says reps are the most effective way to go to market. That advocacy we perform translates into action steps for the association in working with manufacturers specific to that industry. We convince them to go to market with reps or teach them the most effective way to go to market with reps. The end result is that this provides added opportunities for reps to get more lines to represent.”

• **Access** — “The industry-specific association becomes the resource for manufacturers to gain information concerning representatives,” explains Bergson. He points to the various *Locators* that associations make available that meet this need. “In addition, there is access in the form of consultative help for reps from knowledgeable association executives. That consultative help can take the form of guidance when it comes to providing information about manufacturers, legal assistance, insurance matters and how to run a business. “Basically, it’s one-stop shopping for members and manufacturers concerning people that understand your business and your profession.”

• **Association** — Bergson notes that “the ability for the industry-



**Henry P. Bergson**

specific association to ‘come together’ in order to discuss common issues and take common action is very valuable.” Then, there’s the networking opportunities in the form of national meetings and conferences/trade shows that accompany membership in an industry-specific association.

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# The Argument for Dual Membership

What does all that Miller and Bergson said mean to reps toiling out there in the marketplace? Perhaps there's no better place to get that answer than with the Mack W. Sorrells Company, Inc., Rockwall, Texas. A look at this agency's web site ([www.mwsorrells.com](http://www.mwsorrells.com)) illustrates that whatever the two association executives advocate, Sorrells Company executes. On this site is information communicating the fact that the agency belongs to:

- Manufacturers' Agents National Association (MANA)
- North American Industrial Representatives Association (NIRA)
- The Industrial Supply Manufacturers Association (ISMA)
- Canadian Professional Sales Association (CPSA)
- Manufacturers Representatives Educational Research Foundation (MRERF)

And, they're not alone. Check out the web site for MANA member Nelson & Associates, Sante Fe Springs, California, ([www.nelsonreps.com](http://www.nelsonreps.com)) where you'll read the following:

"Our commitment to work with leading edge companies serving leading edge customers means that we have to stay at the leading edge ourselves. One way we do this is through membership and active participation in the associations serving each of our market areas: AEE, APEM, BICSI, ERA, IES and NEMRA, as well as MANA, the horizontal association for manufacturers' representatives and their principals. Not only that, but we also interface with NAED and NEDA, the distributor associations serving our industries. The formal and informal education we derive is key to our drive to keep 'pushing the envelope.'"

Rest assured, there are others like the two mentioned here. All those memberships, however, beg the very simple question "Why?"

According to Mack Sorrells, president of Mack W. Sorrells Company and MANA's District 7 director, "While in general terms I may receive more help from MANA than from an industry-specific association, I'm a firm believer in belonging to both. Dating back to the time before there was a MRERF or an association directly related to the industry I serve, I've received more educational help from MANA in the pages of *Agency Sales* magazine than from any other source. In addition, MANA is promoting the rep profession 24-hours a day on an international level. That's not anything that a smaller association could accomplish."



**Mack W. Sorrells**

Among the many benefits offered by the ISRGs, according to Sorrells, are their industry meetings and conferences. "Not only are they great educational opportunities, the networking benefits of having everyone else from your industry together in one room can't be matched."

When it comes to dual rep association membership, Sorrells is a true believer. "I'm at the point where I look at the dues I have to pay not as a cost, but rather as an investment in the future of my agency."

While Bergson provided a profile of the benefits of belonging to an ISRG, both he and Miller recognize the differences between MANA and the ISRGs, and they agree that the wise rep ought to consider membership in both.

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## The Real Value of MANA

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"When you consider the words I've already used — advocacy, access and association — you can put a whole different twist on them when it comes to the value of membership in MANA," according to Bergson.

"MANA's advocacy for reps is presented to a much broader universe," he says. "Their approach to advocacy is more like a shotgun compared to the rifle approach used by someone like NEMRA. Their access, especially as it involves education, is much broader and more basic than that offered by the industry-specific group. MANA provides the body of common knowledge that every rep firm needs to survive. And finally as we consider the value of an association, MANA allows all reps to join together and speak with a bigger, louder voice on any number of common issues, not the least of which are legislative."

As Miller detailed in his previous *Agency Sales* article, "MANA, with 4,600 agencies representing more than 100 industries, does not focus on industry-specific relations and industry-specific education. Because of its large budget, professional, full-time staff and worldwide connections, MANA is instead focused on:

- **Worldwide promotion of the rep function** — MANA conducts trade missions and completes speaking engagements all over

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the world in order to promote the association as the premier resource for global manufacturers who want to learn who to work with and how to locate North American reps. The association has cultivated strong working relationships with organizations in China, Germany, India, Japan, throughout Europe and South Korea. In addition, MANA's Manager of International Development occupies a seat on the board of the European-based International Union of Commercial Agents and Brokers (IUCAB).

- **Advocacy at the state and federal levels** — MANA has led its sister associations in the charge to implement commission protection legislation and is even involved in an international effort on behalf of reps through the IUCAB legal working group. The association is a founding member and continues to be active in the Washington, D.C.-based Small Business Legislative Council (SBLC). In addition, MANA sometimes invests substantial dollars in support of "friend-of-the-court" or "amicus" briefs in cases that are important to all reps.

- **General education of both reps and manufacturers** — a full schedule of independent rep and manufacturer seminars educates both constituencies on the intricacies of working together more effectively.

- **Agency Sales magazine** — no

other association publishes a monthly 90-page magazine that covers industry trends and reports on developments in the rep-manufacturer relationship.

- **Matchmaking** — MANA's Online Directory and the classified advertising section of the monthly *Agency Sales* magazine are constantly putting reps and manufacturers together. MANA's working relationship with the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) is noteworthy in the area of matchmaking. NAM, like MANA, is a horizontal association that has more than 10,000 small- to medium-sized manufacturers among its membership. In addition, MANA supports the ongoing NAM lobbying position on behalf of United States' manufacturers.

- **Networking** — MANA's 26 regional chapters, located coast-to-coast, put reps from diverse industries together, allowing them to learn from each other.

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### Raising the Professional Bar

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In summation of his thoughts about promoting membership in a horizontal (MANA) and vertical association, Miller adds, "What we hope to accomplish by adopting this philosophy is to raise the bar for all the professionals who have made independent repping their career choice. Our

***"MANA provides the body of common knowledge that every rep firm needs to survive."***

goal simply stated is to provide the opportunity for all reps to become businesspeople in sales vs. salespeople who are in business. In addition, by MANA and its sister associations working together, as we have in the past, we will be speaking with a more unified voice than ever before when it comes to affecting legislation on a state, federal and even international level. Last and not least, by encouraging membership and participation in more than one rep association, we will be encouraging our constituents to learn from each other. As the jointly sponsored Keystone Conference has shown, reps from various industries share not only problems, but they also share the solutions to those problems."

While continuing in his belief that reps ought to consider dual-association membership, Miller adds that in recognition of the important role "ISRGs play in the health, support and growth of agencies, I would go so far as to advise an alternative course of action. If an agency has just opened its doors and commissions aren't flowing as the owner would like, and the choice of association membership is between an ISRG and MANA, choose the ISRG. Then, once commissions pick up and the agency can better afford dual membership, MANA should be added."

This article, describing the workings of MANA and its phi-

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losophy advocating membership in more than one rep association, is the first in a series that will describe MANA's sister associa-

tions. It is the hope that providing information concerning other organizations — primarily ISRGs — that independent representa-

tives will be proactive in embracing the concept of dual membership, and more important, dual participation. □

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# MANA Recommends Dual Membership In Sister Associations

MANA appeals to the broad spectrum of professional rep firms and their principals. While MANA focuses on broad issues that affect the entire profession of “interdependent” sales rep firms, there are many other excellent organizations that focus on industry-specific issues — issues that MANA could not possibly focus on for the over 100 industries represented by its members.

If you are a MANA member, we appreciate your support but strongly recommend that you consider supporting your industry association as well.

Some of these fine organizations and their web sites are listed below.

**ABA**

American Beauty Association  
[www.abbies.org](http://www.abbies.org)

**AIM/R**

Association of Independent  
Manufacturers'/Representatives, Inc.  
[www.aimr.net](http://www.aimr.net)

**ALA**

American Lighting Association  
[www.americanlightingassoc.com](http://www.americanlightingassoc.com)

**BMC**

Broker Management Council  
[www.bmcsales.com](http://www.bmcsales.com)

**CPSA**

Canadian Professional  
Sales Association  
[www.cpsa.com](http://www.cpsa.com)

**ERA**

Electronics Representatives  
Association  
[www.era.org](http://www.era.org)

**FSG**

The Foodservice Group, Inc.  
[www.fsgroup.com](http://www.fsgroup.com)

**FSMA**

Foodservice Sales &  
Marketing Association  
[www.fsmaonline.com](http://www.fsmaonline.com)

**HIRA**

Health Industry  
Representatives Association  
[www.hira.org](http://www.hira.org)

**IAPD**

International Association of  
Plastics Distributors  
[www.iapd.org](http://www.iapd.org)

**IHRA**

International Housewares  
Representatives Association  
[www.ihra.org](http://www.ihra.org)

**IUCAB**

International Union of Commercial  
Agents and Brokers  
[www.iucab.nl](http://www.iucab.nl)

**MAFSI**

Manufacturers' Agents Association  
for the Food Service Industry  
[www.mafsi.org](http://www.mafsi.org)

**MRA**

Manufacturers Representatives  
of America, Inc.  
[www.mra-reps.com](http://www.mra-reps.com)

**NAGMR**

National Association General  
Merchandise Representatives  
[www.nagmr.org](http://www.nagmr.org)

**NEMRA**

National Electrical Manufacturers  
Representatives Association  
[www.nemra.org](http://www.nemra.org)

**NIMS**

Network of Ingredient Marketing  
Specialists, Inc.  
[www.nimsgroup.com](http://www.nimsgroup.com)

**NIRA**

North American Industrial  
Representatives Association  
[www.nira.org](http://www.nira.org)

**NMRA**

National Marine Representatives  
Association  
[www.nmraonline.org](http://www.nmraonline.org)

**OPRA**

Office Products Representatives  
Association  
[www.oprareps.org](http://www.oprareps.org)

**PTRA**

Power-Motion Technology  
Representatives Association  
[www.ptra.org](http://www.ptra.org)

**UAMR**

United Association Manufacturers' Reps  
[www.uamr.com](http://www.uamr.com)

**USA**

United Sales Agents  
[www.unitedsalesagents.org](http://www.unitedsalesagents.org)

**WAMA**

Wisconsin Association of  
Manufacturers' Agents, Inc.  
[www.wama.org](http://www.wama.org)

**WoodReps**

[www.woodreps.com](http://www.woodreps.com)