

No Respect

Vaporware, travel fun and a toothless genius

By *The Rogue Rep*

One of the most time consuming facets of a pro audio sales representative's life is a visit by manufacturing personnel who want to meet directly with dealers in the rep's territory.

Typically, it goes like this: a manufacturer sales manager or sales "engineer" forces the rep to make a billion appointments for his week-long visit with absolutely no new products to show or even an established agenda.

Seems simple enough – the manufacturing person calls a few weeks in advance to schedule the visit, with the sales rep to meet this person at the airport, and without fail, deliver him to a hotel nowhere near the following day's first appointment.

The week or so prior to the visit, the rep spends hours on the phone, lining up dealer appointments. Don't forget, these need to fit into a tight timeframe, balancing distance, location and whatever slim appointment windows that dealers make available. Of course, there will be no traffic jams that week; the almighty manufacturer has already arranged this with the traffic gods.

It's all perfectly arranged and choreographed... Until the first appointment cancels the night before. This call comes when the rep is picking up the manufacturing person at the airport at 7 pm. (Of course, this totally inconvenient airport is 50 miles out of the way, and not even close to the hotel -

but hey, it offered the cheapest fare.)

Fast-forward to 7 am the next day, and the "two dudes" are beginning another 50-mile drive, heading to the second appointment of the day, which is now first due to the cancellation. Then comes the question: "Can you squeeze in another morning appointment to replace the lost one?"

Uh, sorry dude - not gonna happen! Then the genius follow-up reply: "O.K., let's just schedule another appointment for the end of the day to replace it."

Question – is this the right time to mention that tonight, your six-year old is in her first school play and you promised to be there? Or that your 10-year old has a Little League baseball game, which you also swore you could make?

I'd love to hand the phone to the manufacturing person and have him explain it to my wife. Next time, I'll send him to my house to deal with all of that while I hide out in his hotel room enjoying HBO and room service.

HOW MUCH TIME?

Let's not miss the point that meeting with dealers is absolutely vital – it's truly the best way to get the purchase order. But having a meaningful meeting means that the dealer actually listens to one complete paragraph you've been waiting 20 minutes to say, instead of answering the phone every time it rings.

There used to be a day when mak-



ing an appointment meant an uninterrupted, respectful conversation. These days, the fact that you waited almost a month for a 30-minute meeting complete with constant interruptions that ruin your presentation means nothing to the dealer.

How much time does it take a rep to show a dealer an opportunity to make money? Answer: forever!

However, without a doubt, the best way to get the dealer ticked off (and not buy) is to waste his precious time. The rep also must know when to shut up and listen, not show product the dealer already knows about, and the golden rule – know when to find the door.

No problem, right? Wrong! The dealer is constantly changing direction and product usage. What once was not needed might very well be exactly what's needed right now. If you don't mention that product as a solution again, he'll swear he didn't even know about it. It comes down to human nature. A dealer often treats the rep as if he has only one customer: him.

And funny how these things can work – some days, the dealer has all the time in the world, which I've found directly correlates to the rep paying for lunch. Funnier still, the rep usually deals with just one person at the dealership, but when a free lunch is in the offering, suddenly he finds himself with many new friends at the same dealership.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

The first week of March begins with snow and freezing rain that continues off and on for the entire week. The following week is highlighted by car trouble; I'm broken down on the side of the highway where there's no cell phone reception. Time to trudge through the slush to reach a phone booth. (Remember them?)

A while later, I find myself enduring the ramblings of a toothless tow-truck driver named Earl for two hours as we creep along at 10 miles per hour in stop-and-go traffic toward the closest repair shop.

While trying to learn to drive stick-shift on icy roads (picture fingernails gripping into the dash), Earl explains his many solutions to the world's problems. I gaze out the window into the rear-view mirror, watching my 150,000-miles-plus rep-mobile bouncing down the street, hopelessly dragged by Earl's moaning machine of horror.

I guess I won't be making that 2:30 pm demonstration. Great - the entire day is ruined and I'm 100 miles from home, not to mention the tow charges and a repair bill.

SELL & SELL AGAIN

One of my favorite scenarios: the manufacturer wants us to get orders for a product that doesn't yet exist. Yes, that's what I said. Sell products (that are the result of some product

marketing meeting) which are not available. In the current demanding economy, this goes over just great with dealers.

The purpose of this, I'm told by the manufacturers, is to see if the product has a demand in the marketplace. They want to see if the "product idea that sounded good in a meeting" is actually worth developing, and if it's profitable.

Usually, by the time the product is actually released, its design, look and price are completely different than the original. Also turns out it can't be mass-produced to be what the marketing team dreamed. And, the product's promised launch date is now a sick joke, here and gone and not really ever arriving.

Then comes the question from the manufacturer: why isn't our new product selling? This is when I turn to the visiting sales manager and innocently ask, "hey dude, can you show me how to get an order from this dealer for a product that can't ship and we can't see?"

Am I hitting a sore spot, or am I speaking the truth?

Your independent sales renegade,
The Rogue Rep

The Rogue Rep is a very experienced manufacturer's sales representative. His identity is protected for obvious reasons. Share your thoughts, pain, good and bad stories with him via Live Sound Editor Keith Clark at kclark@livesoundint.com.

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Robert Scovill works as a producer and engineer in recording and live sound. He is a six-time winner of *Mix* magazine's TEC Award for Technical and Creative Achievement.

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