

## Stop dating your manufacturers and start living together.

The more we specialty distributors can get in front of manufacturers, the more they will understand what we do, why we do it so well, and the great value we provide on our side of the relationship.

Fortunately, many manufacturers recognize the need to see the big picture — to understand what we do, and what we look for from them to make the relationship work.

### Good relationships need communication

Over the years, I've been asked to speak to many of the organizations we represent. The opportunity to trade ideas in an open and honest forum is another way we add value to the distributor / manufacturer relationship.

My message to manufacturers is simple and can be summed up in six key points:

- We grow together
- "What did you do for me today?" is a two-sided coin
- Symbiotic co-dependency works
- We're not married, just living together
- We work for each other
- There's no room for ego in the distribution chain

Sometimes I get tough questions. They're the best kind, because I'm

there as a sounding board. They can let it all hang out. As specialty distributors, this kind of give-and-take is just what we need to cement solid relationships with our manufacturers.

I like to make sure they understand that their responsibility is to balance our commitment as a distributor. I tell them, "I'll bend over backward for you, but I won't bend over forward."

### Help them get what they want

To help manufacturers visualize the value of specialty distribution, I use the analogy of a well. The ground water is the manufacturer's products, a pipe is needed to get the water up to the well (customers). The real issue for manufacturers is, "What's the best pipe to get the water to the well?"

For most manufacturers the best route to sales (the pipeline) is a specialty distributor who will sell concepts, differentiate products,

and who has the ability to absorb marketing and distribution costs better than they can. It's a simple fact of distribution — the best pipeline wins.

### Every relationship needs a little give-and-take

Manufacturers are starting to create dealer advisory boards made up of four or five distributors who meet regularly with the company for very frank discussions about product and marketing issues. I'm on four boards, and during our discussions we offer no-holds-barred ideas on how to improve sales. Our discussions always pay off.

If you aren't meeting with your manufacturers on a regular basis, it's time to start. Don't wait. They need you. Remember:

**Production**  
— **Sales**  
= **Scrap**



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