



NATIONAL ELECTRICAL MANUFACTURERS
REPRESENTATIVES ASSOCIATION

***NEMRA GUIDELINES
for Representative
Agency Publicity and
Promotion***

***Developed in conjunction with the Electrical
Marketing Group***

Introduction

To state the obvious, the purpose of promoting your business is to become more visible in your industry among your principals, customers, employees, peers and competitors. You want your firm's name to be associated in everyone's mind as The most respected and professional independent manufacturers representative firm in the market; The independent manufacturers representatives firm to call on for professional, successful product representation; The independent manufacturers representatives firm to call on for information; The independent manufacturers representatives firm most emulated by other reps. Again, to state the obvious, you know your firm is all those things. But, does everyone else? You need to get your name out there – again and again.

How do you promote your business to make that good impression that will set the foundation for your future growth? How do you get the information out in front of the people you want to reach? It depends on how much time you want to invest. There are several methods; from the very simple that anyone can do, to projects that would require outside assistance. This guideline is designed to give you a general overview of several methods you can employ to bring in name recognition value.

Build a Media List

Building an effective media list takes little time and effort. And, since you never know when a good news story will happen, it's good business to be prepared for quick action. You have several groups of people you want to target with information--- your peers, your principals, and, in this age of acquisition, mergers and crossovers, even your competitors. Be sure to add their names to any media mailing you make.

Include on your media list: local newspapers; your Chamber of Commerce; local organization newsletters (think of civic groups, your church, etc.); local radio and TV; trade/business publications in your region; national trade/business publications in your industry; local, state and regional associations you are a member of or support; national organizations in which you are a member; magazines or house organs published by your principals and local electrical league newsletters.

Begin by assembling a list of those in your target groups. NEMRA's media list is included in this Guideline. You also may find the reference department at your library an invaluable resource. Take the time to ascertain the appropriate person to direct your material to. You'll always get better attention if you personalize the address. Keep in mind to aim material at the business editor of large daily papers; editor of smaller dailies and weeklies; editor of trade publications; executive directors of trade associations; and, news directors at radio and TV stations.

Periodically you will need to update your list. Changes in personnel are frequent, and your list is only as good as it is accurate. Mailing to obsolete names and addresses will indicate indifference on your part. Also, it pays to tailor your release to the specific needs or interests of the new medium. News worthiness is the prime consideration.

Press Release

This is the quickest, easiest form of publicity. Anyone can do it. To summarize:

On your company letterhead, type the words "Press Release" centered at the top. Drop down a couple of lines and on the left margin, type the date. Opposite the date on the right margin, put "Contact:" followed by the person in your firm who should be contacted for further information on the release information and their phone number and address if different from the one shown on the letterhead. Drop down a couple more lines on the left margin and type "Release Date:". Following the colon should be the date you wish the information in the release held until, or you may simply state "For Immediate Release". Drop down a couple more lines and center your headline, which should be held to approximately six words.

Begin the body of your release with your hometown and state followed by a dash and your first sentence. Type the body of your release double-spaced. Be brief and factual, covering the applicable "five w's" – who what, when, where and why – in the first paragraph. Hold the release to one page, if possible. (If additional pages are needed, indicate "continued" or "more" at the bottom of the first page and begin the next page with a repeat of the headline followed by "Continued"). At the conclusion of your release, skip down two lines and type either "---30---" or "####" to indicate the conclusion.

The most important part of writing your release is to be sure the content contains no errors in information or spelling. Proofread, then let someone else proofread, before mailing anything out.

What should you send out? It's news when you: take in a partner or change the structure of your business; acquire another business or merge with another firm; add an employee to your sales force; move your sales offices or add a warehouse or branch office; take on a new line or announce a new product; increase the scope of your territory; win an award for sales achievement or leadership; are elected to the Board of an association or group, or serve on a committee; receive an award for civic activity or leadership; attend a self-improvement seminar (such as the IPA certification program); have a family member join your firm. **

Sample:

Press Release

WILLING & ABLE INDEPENDENT MANUFACTURERS REPRESENTATIVES
100 West 2nd Avenue
Hometown, ST 00000
(999) 555-1111

Month 00, year Contact: Jack Able

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SALES MANAGER NAMED

HOMETOWN, ST—John Jones, Central City, has joined Willing & Able Independent Manufacturers Representatives, it was announced today by Walter Willing, president of the firm. Jones will serve as sales representative in the northern third of the state handling the firm's full line of quality electrical products.

Jones, 53, is a Vietnam veteran and graduate of State University. For the past three years, he has served as Regional Manager for ABC Manufacturing Company and earlier worked as an account specialist for Conglomerate, Inc. Jones was named "Sales Professional of the Year" by the local Sales Executives Club. He is also active in church work and with the Boy Scouts. He and his wife, Pat, have two children.

Willing & Able are independent manufacturers representatives representing 12 nationally prominent manufacturing companies in the electrical industry. The firm was founded in 1985 and has a full warehouse operation and branch sales offices in Central City and Midtown.

** If possible, send a photo along with your release. The print should be a 5" x 7" professional looking glossy, color or black and white. If you are taking your own photo for the release, keep the background minimal and fill your frame with the subject, keeping in mind that any photo will be reduced in the publication.

Send your release to everyone on your media list. Keep on sending information to everyone, even if nothing gets printed. Consistency and frequency pay off. Then, when one of your releases is printed, be sure to follow up with a thank you note.

Collateral Material

Collateral material consists of any piece of paper with your firm's name on it, including letterhead, business cards, company resume/brochure/mission statement, line cards, direct mail pieces, etc. Because you are not always present in person, these pieces of your business should be as professional and polished looking as possible. They are working for you as your representatives in the marketplace and, in some cases, will establish the perception of your firm. Let them make a good impression for you.

Consistency pays. Make each piece relate to another as far as design and color. The result will be a group of materials that give the impression of a firm that is solid, dependable, professional and intent on maintaining a strong continuous presence in the market. You may need to seek the assistance of a graphics design firm to establish an overall theme or logo for your firm. From there you can work with your local printer to develop materials within your budget.

Advertising

Besides periodic press releases, you may choose to advertise your firm. Advertising can be accomplished in print (display or classified ads), through direct mail or in the disbursement of specialty items.

Display Ads

As a prelude to placing an advertisement, use your media list to gather insertion information and rates from trade publications. Ask to be notified of special issues that may relate directly to reps or certain product areas. And, don't forget your listing in your trade association membership directories. Remember, that ad runs all year.

Remember, the purpose of advertising is to get attention. That doesn't mean your ad needs to be the biggest or catchiest. You're looking for name recognition. In designing the ad, you may choose to simply use your company logo, address, phone and a few well-chosen words to represent your strengths. Most important is to keep all messages clear, truthful and to the point, and to present a professional image.

Once again, you may choose to turn to outside help if you feel the task is out of your realm of capabilities. Check with your friends, peers and fellow association members to locate a reputable graphics design firm. If you have a big budget and plan on making multiple insertions over a period of time, you might want to contact an advertising agency. But remember, ad agencies are looking for long term arrangements for the most part, not one time customers, unless you're willing to really pay for their expertise.

Direct Mail

If you or someone in your office has a flair for writing, the benefits of direct mail can be great for you. Direct mail can be targeted and seems personalized. You will not be competing with anyone – you are not just one ad among many, but command the attention of the person reading your piece. There are no size requirements or deadlines to cope with. You can say it all briefly, or if well written, take several pages and still hold attention. You can use the space to generate action – ask for their call, comment, and visit.

Whether you choose a newsletter, letter, self-mailer or flyers/updates, keep in mind the most important key to direct mail is consistency. Develop a realistic publication schedule and stick to it. Give the effort time before you try to evaluate its effectiveness.

Use your direct mail format to persuade, inform, remind and assist your reader. If you do, you'll have a reader primed to receive your next piece. Focus and organize before beginning your copy writing. Picture the people to whom you are writing and what they need to read. Write logically and in a relaxed way, not conversationally, in basic English. Don't overlook humor as an effective communication tool.

Don't write unless you're in the mood. It will show. Above all, proofread, and then proofread again. Be aware of the appearance of your piece. Even typed, blank ink on white paper without further adornment creates a picture in grey. Look at examples you have received and pick out what looks best, what starts you reading. If you have developed an overall collateral material style, carry it through in your direct mail pieces. If you choose to use artwork, keep in mind that photos are preferable over line - art.

Build your direct mail list based on your current list of customers, prospective customers, and former customers. Other good sources include magazine publishers, list compilers and trade associations. Always strive to have names, not just titles. After your first mailing, keep the list current by updating from postal returns. The simple statement "address correction requested" printed under the address will cost extra, but the post office will inform you of any address change when they forward the letter. If you choose to produce a newsletter, don't overlook the additional distribution available through your salespeople. Have them carry a quantity with them to drop off on sales calls.

Specialty Items

Before choosing any specialty items, take a look around your office. What have you been given and kept and used? *Don't waste your money on throwaways or items universally overused.* In passing out specialty items, quality is frequently better than quantity in getting the most consistent recognition through long-term use.

Association Membership

Maintain your membership in your regional and national trade associations. Get to know your peers. Volunteer to serve whenever possible, and then publicize your extra effort on behalf of your industry. Maintain an accurate listing in their membership directory, advertise in that publication if allowed, and be sure to include the association on your media list. Besides reaping the benefits of the association, you will be increasing your visibility through active participation. Your firm will be perceived in a favorable light for your commitment to the industry and for your commitment to the betterment of your business skills.

Trade Shows

Many trade shows have a press area or room for the purpose of leaving materials for the media's use. In addition to dropping off the materials of the principal you are representing in the show, if you have developed a presentation kit on *your* firm, leave it also.

The Internet and E-mail

An **e-mail address** serves your company much like a telephone number or postal address, allowing people with Internet access to send messages and other data to each other almost instantly.

To make the most of your e-mail address, add it wherever you would put your phone number; on stationery, business cards, advertisements, and other collateral material.

When you start to receive messages, be sure to send prompt, brief, and effective responses. For example, if you offer online product support, and someone e-mails a specific problem they are having, send a comprehensive solution back via e-mail. Too often, the customer is simply referred to the company's 800 number, which they could have called in the first place.

One warning: Although e-mail is as immediate as a telephone conversation, it also has the weight of the written word. Never use sarcasm in your correspondence. Without your tone of voice or facial expression to help convey your meaning, your message could seem unintentionally hostile. Write when you are feeling calm and in control, and carefully reread your message before sending it.

A well-designed **Web site** gives users the sense that they are visiting an actual place where they can gain useful knowledge, research products, or conveniently place orders.

If your Web site visitors feel that their visit has been worthwhile, they are likely to return, making your company name seem more familiar and dependable with each visit.

Your site should have a clean design that will be easy to read, fast to download, and simple to navigate. Visit other Web sites for inspiration. Pay attention to the services and design elements that were particularly enjoyable and helpful. The range of what a Web site can offer is limited only by available memory and your imagination.

Discussion groups, which may be called by such names as news groups or forums, can provide you with the opportunity to make contacts with individuals who share certain interests. Some groups "talk" in real time, some exchange messages by posting them on a virtual "bulletin board", and others automatically forward all messages to everyone who joins the mailing list.

It is usually not a good idea to advertise your products or services directly. This is considered pushy, and it consumes the limited memory available for messages.

A better tactic is to become known as someone who contributes. First, become acquainted with the general atmosphere and code of behavior of the group (each one is different). Read messages, but don't post any right away. This is known as "lurking."

Once you are ready to contribute, keep your messages brief and helpful. You may mention, when appropriate, that you have information about a service or product available by e-mail, but leave it at that.

What may work better is to end your messages with a "business card"; adding your title or company name underneath your signature. These work because you can make your services known in a low-key way, while avoiding a commercial slant in the body of your message.

A concern for all areas of Internet use is **security**. Do not encourage anyone to send their credit card number online unless you have a strong encryption program in place.

Also remember that any sensitive company information that's on a hard drive connected to the Internet is vulnerable to online theft. Protect all confidential data by installing security programs and changing passwords frequently. You may even consider leaving sensitive documents on a separate computer which is not attached to a modem at all.

In Summary

Publicity won't make your firm the best; only your hard work will do that. But, your hard work should be recognized, and to be recognized you have to get the news out. Use publicity to increase your firm's visibility and reputation in your industry.

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