
Selling Better In A Changing World

A recurring editorial theme in the pages of *Agency Sales* this year has been the need for independent manufacturers' representatives to be out in front of change. By that we mean change in the way they operate their agencies, change in their method of communicating with principals and customers, and change in how they sell in their territories.



Joe Roman (right) poses with Bill Gates (left) outside the Microsoft trade event VSLive!, held March 24, 2004 in San Francisco, where ASG was invited to represent principal CYGCOM as part of the Microsoft Speech launch.

Change usually doesn't occur without challenge, however. Successfully completing the double play of change and challenge is Montville, New Jersey, rep firm Accelerant Sales Group (ASG).

In their own words, here's how the agency explains who and what they are: "In today's fierce global economy when everyone is focused on increasing profit and saving money, a local company has found the recipe that works. When Joseph Roman was a sales executive at Intel Corporation three years ago, he realized that there had to be a better way to sell to the customers that count for manufacturers.

"When the costs of setting up a field office and training representatives started to soar, something had to give and the 'old fashioned' model had to be redesigned. Roman formed Accelerant Sales Group in 2001 as a premier contracted sales company for high-tech products."

According to Roman, "Our company offers an office, salespeople who are the best in the business, and a reputation based on performance, all for a fraction of the cost of funding and hiring full-time field salespeople."

It's that challenge to redesign the "old-fashioned" sales model that Roman identifies as the greatest challenge he and his firm confront today.

“Many businesses don’t ever get out of their local market because they are afraid of losing up to a million dollars in assuming the risk of setting up and insuring an office, paying someone a \$150,000 salary, auto expenses, \$12,000 in benefits, and countless stock option incentives just to hope that they don’t jump ship for the next best opportunity. We offer service packages that divide sales professionals’ time among several product lines and it dramatically decreases the risks and costs of selling in our area. We are committed long-term to the territory.”

That all sounds good, but there’s much more to the ASG story that only an in-depth conversation with Joe Roman can complete.

According to Roman, he comes by his knowledge of the rep profession through his family. His father and uncle were reps and sold various steel, metal and other construction products. “From my earliest years, I grew up around reps and knew what a rep firm was,” he explains.

Learning From Other Reps

Before setting out on a career as a rep, however, Roman spent eight years with Intel Corporation, where he was in charge of channel sales. “Part of my job was to hire reps to serve our dealer network throughout the country. It was there that I got my taste of what reps were all about and developed my own philosophy that I still follow today.”

It was while working with those reps that he got bitten by the rep bug himself. “I’ve always been an entrepreneur. Even looking as far back as high school, I had my own business. It was nothing high-tech, just a company that did some landscape design and gardening. It was more manual labor than anything else. In the corporate world I was earning six figures and getting promotions every year, but that wasn’t enough for me. After working with rep firms for a while, I saw how they were able to work on their own and create great careers for their owners. I reached a point where I had enough money saved up to do something for myself. After talking to my father about it, I decided to go out on my own. I leveraged all the connections I had and took the step to combine the old way of doing business with new high-tech methods of selling. That was the beginning of Accelerant.”

Shortly after opening the doors of his rep firm, Roman admits one of the first things he did was to

join MANA. “During the years he worked as a rep, I’ll admit my father was never a member,” he says. “But as I was planning what we were going to do, he had heard about the association from someone else he knew and he suggested I join. One of my initial goals in joining was to have other rep firms hear about me. After a couple of months, my goals changed to wanting to grow my principal base. To pursue that, I’ve talked to people at MANA headquarters and they’ve been a great help.”

Joining MANA wasn’t all he did. Another major step was to form an advisory board of professionals who would guide him in his company’s hoped-for growth. “I told them that I was just beginning, I wasn’t making a great deal of money yet, but that I needed their input. Seven individuals agreed. Then we put together a formal business plan and moved forward.”

And move forward he did. Income in the first half



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The Accelerant Sales Group File

Accelerant Sales Group is a professional sales outsourcing firm specializing in providing dedicated field sales and marketing/management teams for technology manufacturers in the East Coast market.

- Location: Montville, New Jersey
- Products sold: Hardware, software products for industrial computing, communication, telephone, cables, power cords, transformers, power supplies, plastics, sheet metal
- Customers: Technology manufacturers, OEM and end users
- Territorial regions: New Jersey, New York, eastern Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland and Massachusetts
- Web site: www.accelerantsales.com

of the company's first year was in the six figures and Roman says growth has been about 15% annually since then. One of the keys to the firm's growth and one of the ways Accelerant shows how a rep firm can meet the challenge of change is the firm's web site (www.accelerantsales.com).

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Harnessing the Web

A visitor to the site will immediately see the wisdom of Roman's words when he says, "It's critically important today to project a professional image, and nothing does that more effectively than a state-of-the-art web site. When I look at the rep business and see an agency that does not have a web site, I see a com-

pany that's sending a message to prospective principals that they are too set in their ways and aren't willing to think out of the box. It also tells principals that the rep firm is reluctant to invest in itself. As a result, the principal has to ask itself, "What will the rep firm do for me?"

After visiting the Accelerant web site, there is no danger of manufacturers asking that question — and getting the wrong answer. Even the casual web traveler will find clearly spelled out:

- The agency's business philosophy — "ASG was established as a regional independent sales representative firm that can integrate into an existing sales team and strategically align their force for immediate sales results. The team of professionals at ASG strives to seamlessly merge with the existing corporate culture and create win-win and synergistic relationships that will yield long-term results. This relationship affords manufacturers the luxury of allocating 100 percent of their efforts to their core competencies and to be the best at those particular functions."
- The benefits of outsourcing — "Due to the high costs of hiring, training and funding in-house, full-time sales representatives, in most cases, it is more profitable to outsource much of the professional field sales functions. The benefit proposition has increased in using an outsourced sales model for companies whose core competency is engineering and technical manufacturing."

- The advantages offered by ASG — "There are distinct advantages to using Accelerant Sales Group to represent your products and services.
 - "Pay commissions based on sales performance.
 - "Established local business and personal contacts and relationships.
 - "Complementary lines open doors for your line.
 - "Experienced sales professionals, often with 10 to 20 years' sales experience in the area.
 - "Control of prices.
 - "Easy-to-monitor and control geographic, market segment and account focus.
 - "Frequent, strong product/application know-how."
- Why partner with ASG — "There are certain factors that favor the effective use of ASG as your manufacturers' rep firm:
 - "ASG begins each relationship with manufacturers by reviewing and creating a comprehensive sales plan.
 - "The expertise and confidence of a large corporation without the up-front costs and risks associated with it.
 - "Experienced staff with the knowledge and ability to quickly and efficiently learn manufacturers' product lines and quickly achieve higher sales volumes in specific territories.
 - "Using ASG as a rep firm allows manufacturers to still own relationships through direct or channel customers that may purchase through a distributor or alternate source."
- A complete list of services — "ASG's core expertise is in architecting and managing the following processes for technology-based firms:
 - "Full-service account management, including forecasting and customer territory analysis.
 - "Full-time target account selling services with professional field representation.
 - "Speaking engagement services at key industry events and prospects.
 - "Architecting sales plans for coverage of ex-

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isting customers within a territory and closing business with new prospects.

- “Use of ASG’s database to determine opportunities for hiring of marketing resources.
- “More frequent contacts and more effective coverage of the manufacturer’s account potential.
- “Joint management cooperation in sales forecasting, market planning and market analysis.”

Roman’s belief in the benefits of the web site is heard in his words when he says, “It’s just another example of a picture being worth 1,000 words. The visual presentation of the web site creates a public image of our organization and lets any interested principal learn all he needs to know about us.”

The agency’s task of producing a professional web

site was facilitated, according to Roman, via the efforts of his brother who designed and maintains the site for the agency. In addition, one of the members of his advisory board provided guidance in getting the site listed with the more popular search engines, thereby driving traffic to the site.

He adds, “While I’m a firm believer in never spending extra money when you don’t have to, I’ve learned the benefits that technology can offer when it comes to marketing and communication. Use of a professional web site creates the kind of image you want to project for your agency. In this business, image and performance are everything. The web site gives us a start with creating the image. The virtual presence we’ve achieved is like having a rep on steroids out in the territory.” □

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