



## Five fatal business mistakes

by John Haskell  
aka Dr. Revenue®

**B**usiness is tougher today than it was a year ago. Recently, a mid-sized company evaluated its situation: It faced a quickly shrinking market, and people just weren't buying as much. Competition was cutting prices in spite of higher costs. Salespeople were losing business all over the country. What options did they have to improve the business? They started by asking themselves two questions: First, what were they currently doing? Second, what had they not done in the past?

Five specific areas tend to stand out in examinations like this. Individually, each is a problem; collectively they can spell disaster for your business. Luckily, it isn't impossible to eliminate these mistakes, as long as you have the discipline and desire. Here are the five fatal business mistakes you could be making:

### I. No Marketing Plan

The marketing plan is the starting point, as it allows the entire company to know the tactics to achieve the goals.

There is only one cure for this mistake: Write a plan. The format is simple:

1. **Goals:** Establish your goals. These need to be hard-edged goals; avoid marshmallow marketing, such as soft sales targets, undefined goals, weak market data, ineffective advertising and vague promotion schedules. Marshmallows kill!
2. **Problems:** Identify the major problems that stand in the way of reaching your goals.
3. **Opportunities:** Spell out the opportunities that offset the problems. For example, you may not be well-known, but there is an opportunity because those who do know you like your company and your products/services.

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## 5 IHRA members attend MANAfest '09 . . . "You shoulda been there, too!"

**M**ore than 200 gathered at the Green Valley Resort in Henderson, Nevada for **MANA's** first-ever, all-industry, rep-only management and marketing conference. From Sunday, May 31 through Wednesday, June 3 they participated in workshops and seminars designed to educate and reinforce the best practices in managing a multiple-line, field sales professional firm. And five (5) **IHRA** member companies were part of this important and worthwhile event. They took advantage of MANA's generous offer to charge **our** members the same costs as MANA members - AND - the \$100 subsidy per attendee offered by **IHRA**. Without going into great detail about the programs they experienced, it is more important to hear what they have to say about the Conference:

**Kent Kulovitz, Kulovitz & Associates** - "The one thing I took back from **MANAFEST '09**, is that we are not alone in trying to tackle all the challenges of running a rep business. There is help everywhere."

"Every industry representative that was at this meeting has the same problems we have and all are concerned about improving the daily communication with factories, accounts and your sales force. Concerns about technology are real; how to pursue new lines, new industries or new people or to just self-analyze yourself and what you truly want out of your business. Top notch meetings on all



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4. **Strategy:** Define a longer-term strategy – this is the “What?” statement. What do we want to be four or five years down the road?
5. **Tactics:** Define your tactics very specifically. This section of the plan, accompanied by a marketing calendar and at least an adequate budget, provides the road map for execution, which leads to sales success.

This simple prescription for constructing a marketing and sales plan makes it easy – you write to the outline. Take your time and fill in the blanks. Start with opportunities. Then sort the opportunities in order of priority.

### II. **A weak or non-existent factual understanding of the marketing environment;** your company doesn't have a competitive matrix.

Every company has a position in the market based on specific attributes. For example, a cookie company judges its position by the taste, price, size, and location compared to nearby competitors who are making a similar product.

These facts provide many opportunities to get insight into your position in the market. Narrowing them down to black and white, analyzing the vital differences and planning how to respond to the competitive environment is the prescription for success.

### III. **Lack of understanding of your customer's real buying motivation.**

The psychology of the customer is vital to marketing and sales success. Small businesses may not be able to afford extensive marketing research, but simple questionnaires and low-cost focus groups can deliver the vital data that allows a company to build marketing, merchandising, advertising, and sales promotion tactics that work. The prescription has three parts: do the research, listen very carefully and, most importantly, act decisively for the long term.

### IV. **No Sales Forecasts**

Planning for the business begins with a sales forecast. If the management team does not look forward, they will get constant surprises.

Forecasting in most smaller and mid-sized businesses can be confined to customers who contribute a significant percent of sales.

Building a forecast for a customer involves a careful, in-depth analysis of the customer's business, the customer's relationship with your company and the customer's marketing plan for the next year.

### **The only person who should do the sales forecast is the salesperson who is closest to that customer.**

Each salesperson must forecast for his or her major customers with a fill-in the blanks, paint-by-numbers approach. There are no excuses. The forecast must be completed by a specific date and the salesperson must be prepared to discuss the rationale behind the forecast.

Let the chips fall where they will. The difference between the sales group's forecast and the management's goal for the year is called the “planning gap.” Filling that gap is what marketing and management are all about. The marketing team's job is to eliminate excuses by salespeople.

### V. **No sales system**

Sales management is key to success. Effective selling is the result of a complete system. Effective salespeople are “self-managed professionals.” Self-managed professionals know that phone calls must be organized beforehand, records must be kept and selling is a disciplined process.

Effective, professional selling is based on utilizing the company's marketing program to create a working marketing and sales plan for each significant customer. The self-managed professional salesperson has a game plan for every 30-day period. He or she works the plan every day. Every phone call and every visit is designed to further the plan. Becoming a self-managed professional salesperson starts with this statement. “I know my customer, I know my company's products and I know my company's marketing plan. My job is to bring these three elements together into a short- and long-term plan for each of my best or potentially best customers. I sell products that will not come back to customers who will.”

Eliminating these mistakes allows a business to solidify its position in the market and move forward regardless of the economy. Very few companies have large market shares. Therefore, if your company has eliminated these mistakes and is moving forward, you are positioned to take a little business from each of your competitors who have not eliminated the mistakes. A little here, a little there and you are doing more than holding your own – you are growing your share of market. When the economy bounces back, you will reap tremendous benefits.

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## MANAfest '09 (continued from page 1)

of these subjects at this conference. A real first class event, that I would certainly attend again.”

**Donna Peake, The Barrington Rep Group** - “MANAfest turned out to be the perfect antidote to a challenging economy. Has it cured the economy? – No. Did I come away with lots of ideas to implement and a much improved attitude? – Yes.”

“All attending MANAfest were entrepreneurs who are resilient, fun, and positive with innovative thought processes looking for new paths to keep their businesses healthy. The group of attendees and all the speakers reinforced why I love being an entrepreneur and working with entrepreneurs. I went to the event thinking my goal was to support my profession and wondered if this was the time to incur the additional expense. I left MANAfest feeling that it was one of the best decisions I have made this year!”

**Steve Grossman, GM Partners** - “I have just returned from MANAfest and my head is still spinning from all the new information and opportunities that came to us. My review might be a little different from the other IHRA members who attended, since within the last year and-a-half, I have attended The Keystone Conference, CPMR 401 refresher course, and now MANAfest. Even though there was some overlap between these educational seminars, I still walked away with goodies to support and grow my rep business.”



“What really pleased me is seeing our rep function offering quality venues to support and raise the bar of being a professional rep, gaining new ideas and wanting more. I truly enjoyed the industry overviews and trends presented by experts, not forgetting the useful information about line profitability, how to hire good people, using Microsoft to the fullest, and how not to say ‘no.’ I hope to see more of you there next time to invest in your future.”

**Mark Glotter, Marketshare Sales** - “My wife and many friends are required to take continuing education in order to keep their licenses or jobs. Even real-estate agents (sales people) must also do so. So why not manufacturers representatives? After nearly 30 years as a manufacturer’s representative, I thought it was time to educate myself and attend MANAfest '09. It was quite a whirl wind of a few days. I didn’t re-learn how to sell but I did realize it’s time to step back and look at a few areas of my business.”



1. **Marketing.** How do I let manufacturers know I am out there? How do they find me?
2. **Free Web Seminars.** We heard from various companies that offer free advice on sales and issues facing sales representatives.
3. **Office.** How to better manage Outlook in your computer (very popular seminar) and better “computer health.”
4. **Managing your vendors.** How to evaluate new lines.

“There were speakers on the business lobbying efforts as well as MANA’s lawyer reporting on the State and National Rep laws. Economists spoke on the recession as well as marketing experts telling us what to expect next. Most of all, these few days away made me look at my business and what steps are needed to change things around. Everyone’s business is hurting and when sales start to improve, are you going to be there fighting for your share?”

“I certainly am.”

**Editor’s note:** Mark also points out . . . .”From our foundation, MRERF, there are now 3-day to 3-year courses on becoming the best sales rep you can be. It doesn’t matter your age because you CAN teach an old dog new tricks!”

**MANAfest '09 . . . “You shoulda been there, too!”**

## Here's a continuing feature in IHRA's *REPorter* newsletter: "Tech Bits"

*Gregg Marshall, CPMR, CSP, is a speaker, author and consultant. He can be reached by e-mail at [gmarshall@reconnection.com](mailto:gmarshall@reconnection.com), or visit his website at <http://www.reconnection.com>.*



### **Tech Bit 17- Powering Most Electronics Anywhere**

I "joke" with the TSA agents looking at the x-ray of my backpack I carry onto planes that it is a walking Radio Shack.

I have the usual electronic travel toys: notebook computer, MP3 player, noise canceling headphones, wireless mouse, cell phone, etc. I also occasionally carry a portable printer and/or a portable scanner.

The problem with all these toys is they all need power. And they all have different power bricks (AC adapters). Plus on long flights if you are lucky you can plug your computer and/or MP3 player into the plane's power supply, which of course is a unique plug.

Rather than carry all those bricks and second adapters for airplanes, I use a universal power adapter. There are a number of companies that make these adapters. iGo was an early one (<http://www.igo.com/>). More recently Kensington has made a small unit (<http://us.kensington.com/html/11168.html>). Targus has a large number of notebook accessories, one is a universal adapter (<http://www.targus.com/us/powerstore.asp>).

All these adapters work the same way. The adapter comes with an AC cord, an empower cord, and a car cigarette lighter to empower adapter. They are compatible with any power, either 110 or 220 volt and 50 or 60 Hz. They come with a number of interchangeable tips that let you power different notebook computers (I've been creative and figured out how to power my portable printer using a similar computer's tip).

You can also buy a secondary adapter cable that will charge MP3 players or cell phones. Again they use interchangeable tips to adapt for many different devices.

The bottom line on these universal power adapters is the best one for you is the one that has the tips to power the notebook, cell phone and any other electronic toys you might travel with. Let the tip wars begin! Right now iGo (and its OEMs) seems to be winning.

### **Tech Bit 18 - Power "Brick" Frustrations**

Why can't the engineers of the world figure out a standard set of power adapters and plugs? Every electronic device has its own AC adapter with a different plug and voltage. It's stupid.

But we're not going to get that problem solved in the next few weeks. So we live with piles of power brick (AC adapters).

One problem is like baggage, many adapters look similar. They may even have

the same plug, but operate at different voltages. Plug the wrong brick into the wrong device and you may get snap, crackle, pop as the device fries itself.

I suggest that as soon as you open a box, you label the power brick with the make and model number of the device. I've used small round labels or a silver Sharpie pen to label the brick.

While visiting a hotel a couple of years ago, I was talking to a hotel staff person. He noticed my iGo universal power adapter and asked if I needed a spare. It seems that the hotel had a number of them left by guests in their lost and found. Given these universal adapters can cost \$100+, leaving them behind can be very expensive.

There is a simple solution. I've put a return address label on my power bricks. That way if someone finds it, they can return it.

### **Tech Bit 19 - Reduce Email Overload**

Suffering from email overload? Join the club.

One issue I've noticed helping several people is they have hundreds, in some cases thousands, of emails in their inbox. And a lot of those emails are marked unread.

I don't know how people can operate in that environment. Your goal should be an empty inbox.

There's a well known time management maxim for paperwork—handle it once. Read it, deal with it and either file it (if it's important) or delete it. I file most legitimate emails, using Microsoft desktop search to find them later. Any email I can't deal with immediately (usually only one or two in any day), I put in a folder "To Act On." That folder I scan each day the same time I deal with spam.

To reduce the number of emails you have to deal with, make sure your junk mail filters are turned on. Since they can trap legitimate emails you still need to check the junk mail folder, just in case. But if you sort that folder by who the email is addressed to you can skip looking at any email not sent to your email address(s). If spam gets really out of hand, you might want to ask your hosting service if they can enable a feature called Boxtrapper. It is a simple challenge system that requires any unknown person sending you an email to respond by simply replying to the challenge message.

Of course if you are so completely behind in your inbox you might consider "email bankruptcy." Set up a temporary rule to respond to any email in your inbox that you can't deal with your email and are deleting all your emails... Then start over and keep up this time.

## Opportunities to make you and your staff better at what you do for a living

One of the most important challenges of IHRA's mission is providing educational opportunities for our members and their staffs that make them better at what they do as multiple-line, field sales professionals. We will keep you posted on these opportunities and encourage participation whenever and wherever possible.

IHRA and more than 30 other representative associations support the **Manufacturers' Representatives Educational Research Foundation (MRERF)**, a charitable, education foundation.

The Foundation is dedicated to:

- \* Raising awareness of the independent multiple-line selling organization
- \* Providing professional education for the representative community
- \* Funding research concerning the representative function of business
- \* Providing information on the value of the function to the marketplace

The MRERF Education Program provides educational opportunities through certification, sales training, and continuing education programs. The Foundation also prepares educational materials, and publishes resource material and periodic reports concerning the representative function. All information generated by MRERF is available to both the academic and business communities.

MRERF's educational subsidiary, the Institute for Professional Advancement (IPA), is the credentialing organization for all designations. Their education programs have two distinct, yet synergistic, focus areas: Consultative Selling and Rep Firm Management. Program graduates receive the Certified Professional Manufacturers Representative (CPMR) or Certified Sales Professional (CSP) designation. Their research spotlights understanding and improving the representative function.

**Certified Professional Manufacturers Representative (CPMR)** is for anyone providing outsourced sales functions to manufacturers, regardless of industry. It is a professional designation earned by an individual, not a firm.

The CPMR program is executive education for firm owners and managers. Participants invest one week annually for three years on campus at Arizona State University. Attendees gain knowledge and insight into operating a business more effectively and profitably.

During the three years of CPMR programming, designation participants create an international network of colleagues with a common body of knowledge and mutual ethical standards. Reaching beyond a single industry and across the profession, the CPMR designation identifies individuals that are committed to being on the leading edge.

## Calendar for CPMR

### CPMR 2010: January 9-14

Be ready for five days of intense instruction, interaction and reflection. You will return to the office with a To-Do List chock full of ideas for improving your business.

Tuition is \$1,345 for IHRA members and \$1,845.00 for non-members. This includes classroom instruction, final exam, course and study materials, coffee breaks, and one programmed reception and meal. Not included are lodging, meals except as noted, or transportation.

All classes are held at Arizona State University in Tempe, AZ. After you apply, you will be mailed an information packet including hotel information.

Arrive in Phoenix Saturday for evening check in. Depart Thursday after the written exam. Exam begins at 8am, and takes up to four hours.

**The Certified Sales Professional (CSP)** program gives a thorough understanding of consultative selling. From business creation to improved time and territory management; goal-setting to prospecting, and everything in between, attendees return to the territory with a renewed enthusiasm for selling.

Regardless of industry or place in the sales channel, you want CSP. Anyone calling on customers will find great value in the program. Three days of instruction, interaction and role-play will energize you and increase productivity and profitability.

As a sales professional, you are faced with knowledgeable, demanding buyers. Buyers expect a salesperson to be well-informed, able to demonstrate expertise in their products, and show professionalism. CSP graduates do just that.

A salesperson needs to provide value – not only in the products and services they are selling, but in the relationships they have established.

### Upcoming CSP Sessions in 2009:

September 15 - 18	Raleigh, NC
October 6 - 9	Chicago, IL
October 27 - 30	St. Louis, MO

Tuition is \$1,395 for IHRA members. Fee includes program, all teaching materials, certification registration including oral exam, lunch and certificate of course completion. Classes run Tuesday through Thursday, 8:00am to 5:00pm, with breaks and lunch. These classes fill up fast. Reserve space, NOW!

**Complete information about MRERF Programs - including "Managing Your Manufacturers Representatives Network (MMRN)" . . . a program specifically designed for manufacturers who utilize, or want to utilize field sales professionals to bring their products and programs to market . . . available at: [www.mrerf.org](http://www.mrerf.org)**

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**Contact:** Alexander Ruiz de Aguirre, Gen Manager  
**eMail:** arag@magefesausa.com

**Territories:** All U.S.A.

**Commission Rate:** 5 - 10%     **Sales:** \$1,000,000

**Years in Business:** 50

**Channels Currently Sold:** Through reps to Catalogs and Websites

**Seeking Sales Through:** Department Stores, Discount Stores, Distributors, Drug Stores, Gourmet Stores, Specialty Stores, Wholesalers Groceries/ Supermarkets, TV and E-Commerce

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626.513.2830 • 626.513.2832  
Fax: 866.460.2830

**Contact:** John W. Shen, Manager  
**eMail:** ohnweis@newayusa.com

**Territories:** USA, Canada, Mexico

**Nat'l Sales:** \$2,000,000

**Commission Rate:** 5%     **Years in Business:** 3

**Currently Doing Business:** thru reps in NJ, NY, WI, IL

**Channels currently sold:** Grocery, Supermarket Chain, Mass Merchant Chain, Specialty

**Seeking Sales Through:** Department Store, Grocery, Drug

**Products:** Thermometers: Meat, Fridge/Freezer

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## 2009 / 2010 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### July

7 - 15  
Atlanta Int'l Gift & Home Furnishings Market  
Atlanta GA

16 - 20  
California Gift Show  
Los Angeles CA

### August

1 - 4  
Orlando Gift Show  
Orlando FL

8 - 10  
Gourmet Housewares Show  
San Francisco CA

8 - 11  
San Francisco International Gift Fair  
San Francisco CA

15 - 20  
New York International Gift Fair  
New York NY

22 - 25  
Seattle Gift Show  
Seattle WA

23 - 26  
Montreal Gift Show  
Montreal ON Canada

### September

12 - 14  
Dallas Total Home & Gift Market  
Dallas TX

12 - 14  
Atlanta Fall Gift & Home Furnishings Market and  
The Atlanta Gourmet Market  
Atlanta GA

13 - 15  
Vancouver Gift Show  
Vancouver BC Canada

14 - 17  
Las Vegas Market  
Las Vegas NV

### October

13 - 16  
New York Tabletop Market  
New York NY

14 - 17  
Las Vegas Furniture Market  
Las Vegas NV

17 - 22  
International Home Furnishings Market  
High Point NC



**August 8 - 10, 2009**  
**Moscone Convention Center**  
**San Francisco, California**

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show 2010

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