

Why There Will Always Be Reps

A week of snorkeling and kayaking in the Florida Keys reminded me of one of the reasons there will always be manufacturers' reps.



Everywhere the Atlantic met the shore, I saw mangrove trees, and only mangrove trees, thriving in the shallow ocean water.

Why only mangrove trees? Because mangrove trees adapted to thrive in environments that would kill any other tree. Ocean water salty enough to kill any other tree. Ocean tides that would drown any other tree. Waterlogged soil so barren of oxygen it would choke any other tree.

And not only do they thrive in toxic environments, mangrove trees gradually actually make the environment around them better because their massive in-the-water roots slow tidal water just enough to let sediment settle and build soil up around the tree.

Why did mangroves remind me of manufacturers' reps? Because savvy salespeople around the world look at their local markets and say: "There may not be enough business here for a factory to base a full-time salesperson locally, or even for a salesperson to stop here very often. But there are definitely orders to be written here.

"A salesperson trying to live off the orders from one factory's products would starve here, but if I could find 10 or 12 manufacturers who need local sales coverage, I could thrive here."

So, mangroves and reps both adapt and thrive in environments too harsh for their competition. Too salty, too drastic tides, too little oxygen in the soil for trees that would compete with mangroves. Orders too sparse and too dispersed for direct salespeople who would compete with reps.

That is why there will always be reps. Because while some look at a market and say, "nothing could grow here," reps look at the same market and see opportunity.



Charles Cohon, CPMR, is CEO and president of MANA. In 2016 Cohon earned the Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation after completing American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) coursework and testing. Cohon also earned an MBA with honors and with concentrations in strategic management and entrepreneurship from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, and was founder and owner of a very successful Illinois manufacturers' representative firm for nearly 30 years before joining MANA.