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## Maureen Ingram

The M&M Sales Company

Keeping Focus  
on the Business

Line Profitability  
Remains Key to  
Rep Success

What Do Customers  
Expect From  
Salespeople?

Make It Easy for  
Someone to Conduct  
Business With You



# Keeping Focus on the Business

BY JACK FOSTER

It's been more than two decades since *Agency Sales* magazine visited with Maureen Ingram, owner of The M&M Sales Company, and while over the years change has remained a constant for her agency, there are three things that haven't changed:

- Her adherence to the power of focus.
- Her belief that strong relationships serve as the foundation for her agency's success.
- And finally, the maintenance of one of the agency's core beliefs to provide POS (Positively Outrageous Service).

The Columbus, Ohio-based agency represents a variety of manufacturers that sell products to gift shops, grocery stores, pharmacies, hospital gift shops, major chains and alternative markets throughout the state.

At the very beginning of a conversation about her agency, Ingram credits valuable guidance she received years ago from regular *Agency Sales* contributor John Haskell ("Dr. Revenue"). According to Ingram, "I've got to give credit to Dr. Revenue. When I attended one of his seminars, he opened my eyes to the importance of keep-

According to Maureen Ingram, right, "POS, as we call it, is our company motto. It is something useful and provided in addition to goods purchased. POS remains an unexpected service delivered at random, and it creates loyalty and lifetime customers. We empower all of our employees to make fast decisions in favor of the customer. This sets us apart from our competition."







## “We’ve continued to develop strong relationships over the years....”

ing a steady focus on my business and concentrating on those lines that would really make a difference for us. What he did was to come in and tear my business apart, all the while making me understand the significance of focusing on just a few principals who met certain important innovative criteria.”

She continues that at the urging of Haskell, those criteria that she focused on were finding and working with principals who were:

- Team players.
- Innovative.
- Supportive of the reps they work with.
- Always consistent in paying their commissions on time.

Adopting those considerations as her agency’s marching orders, she explains, “Our goal was to go where people were going. We began looking at customers where people were shopping and where we were already achieving success. During the pandemic that approach has served us well. We’ve continued to develop strong relationships over the years with those kinds of accounts and that’s pulled us through.”

### Importance of Relationships

Couple that valuable input with her own belief in the importance of establishing, nurturing and maintaining relationships with principals and accounts, and you have The M&M Sales Company’s formula for success.

As related in *Agency Sales* in 2001, Ingram and her twin sister made the move from corporate America to careers as reps after becoming disillusioned with life in corporate America. According to the article, when they started their respective careers, they were provided with good salaries, expense accounts and company cars as corporate salespeople. After just a couple of years they noticed that when bonus checks were issued at the end of the year “...everyone shared equally whether they made their quotas or not. Since we made our quotas, and others hadn’t, that didn’t seem quite right to us.” Hence, the move to opening the agency.

Admitting that the two of them had little or no idea of what reps did, one of the first steps Ingram did was complete the CPMR certification from MRERF. “I learned about it through MANA and I have to admit that



The M&M Sales Company’s sales reps, left to right: Beth Connelly, Tricia Stanton, and Leslie Strickland.



Larry Scheiderer checking inventory.



M&M Sales' service reps, top row, from left: Larry Scheiderer, Stephanie Miller, and Cheryl Kelley.

Second row: Chris Wolferst, Sarah Finke, and Barb VanVranken.

Below: Cheryl Hackney, office manager.

Ingram explains that the agency...is firmly established to "...partner with retailers to spark growth through unparalleled service and superior products that sell."

the three years it took to complete the program were incredible. It really opened my eyes about what it took to be a rep."

That original article noted that Ingram and her sister refused "to be discouraged by the fact they had very little idea what a rep was. Instead, they enrolled in a local college to learn how to start a business and write a business plan."

One of the most important things she says they learned about being successful, and something that returns to that idea of focus, is to limit the number of lines the agency represents. At the outset, the agency repre-

sented 60 lines. "Obviously, that was way too much. How can one keep track of that many lines?"

Today, Ingram explains that the agency, armed with about 12 lines, is firmly established to "...partner with retailers to spark growth through unparalleled service and superior products that sell." A visitor to the agency's website ([www.mmsalesco.com](http://www.mmsalesco.com)) can see how much the agency has achieved and read the explanation that M&M's goal is to "...partner with retailers across Ohio to not just deliver amazing products and service, but to collaborate on creative promotional concepts and ideas. We're far more than a manufacturers' rep firm; we are a *cohesive* team



“We’ve been able to maintain a very strong team of sales and service professionals — all of whom are out there every day, maximizing sales for our manufacturers and supporting our retailers.”

truly focused on helping you grow and improve your business.”

Ingram explains that her agency continues to serve its principals and customers with that ‘cohesive team’ because “I’ve been blessed with a great team of thoroughbreds. All of our people are outstanding, smart, aggressive and continue to exceed sales goals. We also have a dedicated service team that supports the sales reps by providing more service and writing re-orders in high-traffic customers and chain accounts. This program has increased sales for our customers.”

### The Personnel Challenge

A continuing challenge, she adds, however — one that she shares with other rep principals — is that “without a doubt, finding commission salespeople remains a challenge. My message to anyone thinking about a career

change is if you want to earn a great living, build your own business, and create your own lifestyle, then this is for you. We’ll provide the tools you need to be successful, but it’s up to you to go out and earn it.”

Ingram adds, “Thankfully, through our efforts, we’ve been able to maintain a very strong team of sales and service professionals — all of whom are out there every day, maximizing sales for our manufacturers and supporting our retailers.”

She continues that key to maximizing the agency’s efforts are the practices of:

- Building relationships on trust — “We will always be honest and not just try to sell you things that don’t make sense for your business.”
- Listening — “We’re here to help customers solve any issues that you may have with our companies/products.”
- Availability— “We’re readily available to our partners in-store or by email, phone and fax.

As an assist to locating the right people for her team, Ingram says that “We’re interested in anyone who wants to embrace the challenge of working with us. We work with a company that interviews prospective salespeople. We’ve put a profile together and actually test them before hiring to ensure that we’ll have the best chance for long-term success. We’ve spent a good deal of time, money and effort to see that we get the right people.”

Returning to the thought that change remains a constant in the life of The M&M Sales Company, Ingram notes that one thing that has changed is the influence of social media as an important tool. It remains a fact, however, that most people want to communicate in person. “I’d say thank goodness for internet-based communications tools like Zoom that allow us to see and talk to each other. This maintains the personal contact that we have developed with our principals and customers. This has enabled us not only to stay close to established customers, but also opened doors to new ones.”

*MANA welcomes your comments on this article. Write to us at [mana@manaonline.org](mailto:mana@manaonline.org).*

[www.mmsalesco.com](http://www.mmsalesco.com)

The image shows a screenshot of the website for The M&M Sales Company. The website header includes the company logo, navigation links (HOME, ABOUT, OUR LINES, SPECIALS, BLOG, KUDOS), and a call to action 'Order Online'. Below the website screenshot is a photograph of a woman, likely a salesperson, standing in a retail environment. A blue text box is overlaid on the photo, containing the following text: 'HELLO! WE'RE THE M&M SALES COMPANY, YOUR MANUFACTURERS' REPS FOR OHIO. We partner with retailers to spark growth through unparalleled service and superior products that sell. Show Me How!'

**Why partner with The M&M Sales Company?**