

The Distributor Survey: a judicious first step to test the recovery

By Doug Bennett

For a manufacturing company, there are many advantages to using a network of distributors to achieve sales coverage. However, all too often, distributors unknowingly (or sometimes by design!) prevent manufacturers from receiving valuable feedback from their customers. This lack of feedback can be a real issue for a manufacturer's marketing department, especially in those cases where, for whatever reason, the distributor's management discourages direct communications between the manufacturer and the distributor's individual sales representatives.

Sometimes, this issue can be resolved satisfactorily by means of an on-line survey undertaken by an independent third party. Such a vehicle provides manufacturers with a way of asking questions of all of the individual sales representatives that handle their products, while at the same time overcoming many, if not all of the concerns and objections which may underlie the reluctance of distributors' management personnel to allow access to their sales staff.

While perhaps not as beneficial or accurate as a survey of end-users, a survey of distributor sales representatives can nevertheless yield a surprising amount of valuable information and provide unique insights about end-users – and that for a fraction of the price of an end-user survey.

Those manufacturers that have curtailed their marketing spending in response to the recession would do well to undertake a survey of their distributors' sales representatives as a first step towards testing the recovery.

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