

a MANA resource for principals and reps

# agency sales<sup>®</sup>

JUNE 2025  
\$12.97

## Ken Brown

MEP Tech Sales

Putting the  
Pieces Together

Keys to a Fair and  
Balanced Contract

Why Reps Are  
Needed Even  
More in the  
Age of Artificial  
Intelligence

The Ultimate  
Success Skill for  
Managing Change

Make Yourself  
Indispensable

Plus Principal Focus  
A History of  
Working With Reps







# Putting the Pieces Together

BY JACK FOSTER



While it may have taken a while, the pieces to a career puzzle finally fit together three years ago when Ken Brown opened the doors to his agency MEP Tech Sales.

According to Brown, who heads MEP, “The company we started in the spring of 2004, MKT Metal Mfg, York, Pennsylvania, was wholly separate from MEP Tech Sales. Because of a difference in agenda and growth vision, I left my position as President and CEO with MKT in 2022 to start MEP Tech Sales on my own (although I maintain equity in MKT Metal Mfg.).

“My platform as leader of MKT Metal was based on three criteria: When you deal in commodities, a company needs to:

- Innovate.
- Diversify.
- Duplicate.

“I had accomplished all three in my time there. MKT Metal had diversified by selling other products to augment our duct sales. MIRO Industries was one of those products. When I decided to open my own agency, MIRO was the line that I used to “jump.”

With that as the start, today Brown finds himself heading the Winchester, Virginia-based firm that serves customers in the construction industry (i.e., mechanical, electrical, plumbing).

Describing how he got to where he is today, Brown explained, “When fate starts closing the door, if you don’t give up, you’ll find an





Ken Brown is the owner  
of MEP Tech Sales.



“We decided to try the one thing we hadn’t yet done in our career — develop an independent rep agency.”

open window. Such was the case with our humble beginnings. As the CEO/President of our manufacturing company, I was always focused on growth. That can be a challenge when the product you make is a cost-driven commodity. As previously mentioned, my three focal points were innovation, product diversification and duplication. We achieved all. But as often happens, partners can get comfortable, and agendas change. Rather than mope over the situation, we decided to try the one thing we hadn’t yet done in our career — develop an independent rep agency. While maintaining equity in our other company, we launched. Our one key line we were ‘packaging’ with our products had a five-year-plus relationship with us and gladly moved their contract to us when we moved. Hence, our launching platform.”

### **Bunnies and Antelopes**

Explaining the how and the why of the specialty his agency works in, Brown continued: “About 25 years ago, as a distributor sales rep, we were introduced to an innovative concept/product, a common-sense remedy to an otherwise labor-intensive, expensive and, at times, damaging method. We were hooked. Luckily, the market segment the product catered to

was virtually untapped, and is still a ‘bunny and antelope’ sale. This became our primary focus.”

Explaining the bunny and antelope reference, Brown said, “Over the years, we’ve metaphorically categorized sales into hunting jargon. There are elephants, antelopes and bunnies. We’re happy when hitting for average with smaller game. You eat well and, if the product is right, it can be very lucrative. We’re blessed to have premier lines in an arena where the competition is manageable and margins are not eroded by volume hunters.”

He continues, “We’re a smaller firm when compared to others. We like it that way — less is more. Our principals like the focus we offer by being engaged and knowledgeable about what we represent. Although always innovation junkies, we discipline ourselves to be careful not to over-extend and become diluted. Our revenues were about \$2.3M after two years, with goals of doubling that in five years.”

When it comes to locating new principals or having prospective principals find MEP, Brown says, “As a rule, we normally don’t have a problem finding new lines or them finding us. On one particular occasion that I recall, we were at a jobsite where one of our products was be-

ing used. We saw another product that married well with ours. Under our breath, we mentioned, ‘How nice would it be if we had that product to give us a ‘package offering?’ Call it divine intervention or fate, but a manufacturer found us (one of our international principals, to be exact). We are discerning, profitable and far beyond the years of ‘five kids and a mortgage.’ So, there has to be an almost immediate ‘electric’ match and a limit of ‘courtship rituals,’ otherwise we fall off the hook.”

MEP currently works with two international principals; one in Europe and the other in India. “Both possess two important criteria that we look for in international principals — they are privately held and passionate about their business.”

### **Pioneering**

Brown notes that he and his agency have had little experience when it comes to pioneering lines. “We’ve only had one occasion to request fees for pioneering. It was not even questioned. Call it our patina or deep knowledge base, we’ve never needed too much assistance. You have to have confidence in your product and the intuitive data on how your market will respond. Also, and luckily, most of our principals have been almost immediate producers.”

“Our best manufacturer-rep relationships recognize our boots on the ground and do everything they can to support it.”

Continuing on the subject of existing and prospective principals, Brown explains, “Perhaps the largest issue we have is with manufacturers who do the following: Maintain a competitive situation between their own inside sales force and the reps. In other words, ‘house accounts.’ We won’t contract under these stipulations. An inside and outside rep should be a team, with no negative implications — inside out or outside in.

“Some manufacturers don’t understand that sharing in profits for the contracted geography helps finance the energy and commitment of the agency rep(s). And, if a rep knows an account is restricted, they will never dig in to see if there’s more business. For instance, imagine a manufacturer deals with a customer with one project manager who brings them business. Suppose there are a dozen more PMs that no one is aware of. Outside reps are like the field scouts for the cavalry. If the field commander chooses to cut them out of the process, how will he know

about the enemy battalion waiting in the trees? Our best manufacturer-rep relationships recognize our boots on the ground and do everything they can to support it.”

Brown explains, “Thus far, adding employees and sub-reps has not been an issue or on the radar. We market well and stay visible to our base. Many of our distributors have commented that they ‘...don’t see their other factory guys near as much as they see us.’ We’re committed to growth for our principals and to do so you have to be in the game — that’s what I call winning. There are outlying parts of our coverage where a sub-rep, or two, will make sense. Finding that right chemistry requires kissing a lot of frogs. When it’s right, we’ll know.”

Having described the size of his agency, however, Brown is full of enthusiasm about the fact that his son Nick has joined the agency. “I’m blessed that all of my children are brilliant. Nick is hyper-intelligent. I mentioned to him that nothing would please me more than to have him join

## MEP Tech Sales, LLC

### Location:

Winchester, Virginia

### Founded: 2018

### Website:

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

### Territory Covered:

Focused on the Mid-Atlantic States of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington D.C.

### Other Trade Associations:

- The American Institute of Architects
- Mid Atlantic Roofing Contractors Association
- Board member of the Manufacturers’ Association
- Past President of the York County Shrine Club



Two of the lines MEP Tech Sales represents are holding up the above pipe at the NASA facility in Corpus Christi, Texas.

## “As long as you maintain visibility and commitment to the market, you’ll always find opportunity.”

the agency. That would allow me to share with him all aspects of what I do with the goal that eventually he would take over the business. This is something I’ve communicated to my principals primarily because if you don’t let your principals know what you’re planning for the future, it’s a real detriment to the relationship.”

### Transition Planning

He added, “Showing your principals that there is a transition in place is a professional courtesy. It alleviates that concern for their planning. In our opinion, the subject of succession plans should be prominent during the first interview with a prospective principal. And, yes, we intend on passing our firm on to family with most of our principals understanding that dynamic.”

When he’s asked if, over the course of his lengthy career, he’s observed any substantial changes in how business — specifically as it applies to being a rep — is conducted, Brown maintains that “With close to 40 years on the street, we’ve seen lots of change. Most would have to agree that nothing has had a larger impact than the emergence of the “Information Age.” Not only has it made information more readily accessible, it has culturally changed several generations, especially in communication. It has also almost entirely closed the door on impromptu visits where human encounters in reception ar-

eas have been replaced with empty, secured vestibules. But the laws of evolution are as prevalent in the sales game as anywhere else. Figure it out or you’ll perish.”

### Information Age

If dealing with some of the trials and tribulations of the “Information Age” occupy a bit of his time, Brown continues that “Generally, we stress very little about our business or the ‘what ifs.’ It doesn’t pay because we have little — if any — control over most things in business. In today’s shark feed of private equity buyouts, mergers and acquisitions, it is a concern when the ‘soul’ of a company is sold to an outside group. We’re very spiritual and faith-driven. As long as you maintain visibility and commitment to the market, you’ll always find opportunity.”

When it comes to effectively working in this “Information Age,” Brown says that “Long before there was a ‘social media’ we were committed to putting all contact data into a CRM. We’re now on our second-generation platform with more than 15K contacts — all organically acquired. We primarily use LinkedIn as our social media platform. We also strongly push being linked to our principals via their web platforms. Some do, and some have not learned the benefit.”

Finally, when he’s asked, looking back over his career and the

years spent with his own agency, if he would have done anything differently, Brown responds, “Being a relative ‘newbie’ to the rep agency world, our biggest takeaway is the question ‘Why didn’t we do this sooner?’ But as they say, ‘There’s a season for everything.’ Creating an agency without the experience, the knowledge, the street cred, the mentors and guidance would have made it almost impossible.”

Part of that guidance that he refers to has come from his membership in MANA. “We were referred to MANA by one of the rep agencies we knew of that repped the same products we did. I had asked one of the owners to lunch for some mentoring. One of his first suggestions was to join MANA. We joined immediately. MANA has given us a guiding light when navigating through principals and learning how to evaluate the fit including how and when to ask for retainer/pioneering fees, how to protect your firm’s interests and being true to your focus. In addition, many principals have reached out to us by learning of us through the association. We have actually put MANA in front of prospective principals looking to create a contract. We would not be where we are today without the help of MANA.”

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