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BE IMPORTANT TO YOUR CUSTOMERS *AND* YOUR MANUFACTURERS

David Kahle is a sales consultant and trainer. In a recent article he advised distributor sales and customer service people to become important to both their customers and their manufacturers.

You become important to your customers by becoming, in their minds, an integral, almost indispensable part of their business. You can't do that if you limit your activities to quoting the lowest price and picking up orders. Rather, you must systematically create relationships with the most important people within your key accounts. Invest your time in learning about their business and getting to know them better than any other supplier. Then provide creative solutions and systems that solve their business problems. When you do that you become, in the eyes of the customer, a valued part of their business. That makes you more than important. You become indispensable to them.

You become important to your manufacturers when you provide them the one thing they need from you, access to your customers. Think about it. Most manufacturers can warehouse, ship and bill their products almost as well as you can. What they can't do as effectively as you is get in front of your customers and get to know your customers as well as you do.

It's always going to cost the manufacturer more to get to your customer because he has a limited number of products over which to spread his sales costs, while you can spread your costs over a broad range of products. That gives you the advantage of lower cost access to the end user. Your ability to be important to your manufacturers is directly dependent on your ability to provide them effective access to your key customers.