



Leading the channel forward- an insight into ISA's next big win

Written by: Allison Beacham, Freelance Writer

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Changing the way an entire industry handles point of sale reporting is a big task to take on. Really, taking on change at any level is tough to accomplish and it's even harder to create change when something has always been "the way it is".

So, you can imagine that when I entered a room full of global VP's and directors, some marketing, some sales, (all successful) all brought here to address that very big task, I went in expecting a bell to ring, and verbal punches to fly. I was ready for a fight, each side ready to defend their reasoning, protect their agendas and confirm once again that the standardization of POS for the industrial market hadn't been done because it couldn't be done, and wouldn't be changed here today.

But I was wrong. What I saw instead was much more exciting:

After a round of introductions and a brief synopsis on ISA's latest accomplishments, Ed Gerber, the president of ISA announced why we were all gathered.

Ed explained that ISA has been undergoing a shift in focus over the last 9 months to lead the Industrial channel forward and to ultimately, build ISA back up to the voice that it was originally created to be – a leading voice of relevant and impactful change.

ISA had gathered these industry representatives to take on the biggest of questions – but one – that if addressed – could deliver the biggest change: How to standardize and

streamline the process for POS and price lists? Two topics that no one wants to talk about because to this day, no one industry has been able to do it.

The meeting room was full of credible suppliers and distributors who had been endorsed by their companies to be the solution providers. If we couldn't get it done, no one could.

Pre-work had been assigned prior to the meeting and each person in the room had already answered a list of questions on what they currently required and felt were important components to POS.

One of the main goals for the day was to focus on LEAN- eliminating waste out of the channel. If this could be accomplished, we'd be on our way to productive change. But how would we do that?

As day one goals were discussed, the need for a mutual understanding for POS data came up quickly. The difference between using it for good, and using it against one another is often the elephant in the room, and it was obvious that in order to create trust, the elephant in the room would have to be wrestled with.

"Every sales guy thinks they're getting screwed because they don't have the right POS.", voiced Paul, a sales guy through and through.

"We spend way too much time internally trying to figure POS out, and at the end of the day, what value are you bringing to us by having it?" explained Vinny, a distributor partner.

Just as I looked up to watch the match begin, a third comment caught my attention: "If we were all one company- how would we operate?"

This was the comment that took a room of opponents and made them teammates. As that comment sat in the silence, I watched as faces softened, and arms uncrossed.

Now, we had a match that had the potential to be won by everyone.

It didn't take long before solutions started flying around the room. Education would be a key component at every level of the standardization process, making sure that mutual understanding was achieved so that no one felt they were being taken advantage of.

And if we could master phase one, where could we take it from there? The marketing opportunities, research, and further understanding of category and performance management were endless. It was intriguing and motivating.

And so a plan was born: Standardize the data, eliminate non-value-added activity, and automate repetitive procedures, all to elevate new value-added LEAN services.

Working with the “crawl, walk, run” philosophy, the first step would be to create a standard format and online portal allowing both suppliers and distributors access to POS data that read in their language. Have it consistently updated and held to the standard format. Customize the portal to include detail for supplier involvement that would also benefit the distributor.

Watching the suppliers and distributors work together to solve each other's issues, taking the time to understand them and not only speak each other's language but come to a common one was like watching the definition of progress in action.

When an issue came up, the collective think tank in the room went to work to solve the issue together. How would the POS template effectively list every account? A DUNS number would be the solution that everyone could use and have integrated into the portal.

What about freight? Distributors needed it to be included, it could be handled. And chargebacks? A supplier component that needed to be addressed, but would be included because it was important. Nothing was too big or too small an issue to be addressed by the team.

My favorite part of the day was when someone finally asked for a “B.S.” button, one we could press when someone thought that a certain theory might not effectively make it into reality. This right here, this “B.S. button” allowed the team to keep moving forward, but not lose sight of the obstacles that lay ahead for when these theories would become an ISA reality. Who knew a “B.S.” button could accomplish so much?

At the end of day one, after 70 columns of data had been streamlined into around 10, we had our crawl portion of the portal mapped out but there was much more work left for day two.

A big question still remained, how would we trust people to treat the portal as a tool and not a weapon?

The B.S. button would have to be hit if not everyone could take the agreed upon standardized columns and use them for their own knowledge. Would they be enough?

And then, if the crawl phase passed, could the walk phase of the portal succeed?

Despite these looming questions, at the end of the day, the feelings in the room weren't rage, they weren't frustration. They were satisfaction, excitement even. There was more work to do but everyone could see that it could be accomplished.

The success of the day one ideas and strategy would be tested on day two of the meeting with the hope that this work would then create more dialogue and eventually, a change for the industry.

But the accomplishment most important to the entire process had already happened on day one – when the room started to think like one company, one team. It was then that we were able to start mapping the change that would lead the channel forward, understanding that real success comes when our ideas benefit everyone's bottom line.

We are just getting started- but we're already in the lead.



