



Speaker Profile



Mike Marks

An Expert in Market Access and Distribution Channel Strategy

Mike is a candid and engaging speaker, who gets to the heart of timely and critical topics in wholesale distribution. He has spoken to hundreds of audiences in the distribution and manufacturing industries and regularly receives top ratings.

Mike is available to speak on diverse topics, including:

- Sales force management & compensation
- Data-driven market strategy
- Channel management
- Industry trends
- Customer segmentation
- And more!

“In reviewing our meeting evaluation, you are once again our highest-rated presenter. In fact, I would say you are probably our highest-rated presenter of all time.”- Association Executive

To book Mike Marks for your next event or webinar:
Call 321-956-8617 or email Sandie Stewart at [sstewart@ircg.com](mailto:ss Stewart@ircg.com)

About Mike Marks

Watch now: tinyurl.com/MikeMarks

Mike Marks is the Managing Partner of Indian River Consulting Group, an experience-based firm that focuses exclusively on market access and distribution channels. Before co-founding IRCG in April 1987, he worked in distribution management for more than 20 years. Mike always makes an impact with an audience. Two characteristics make groups want him back: He is from the industry. With his experience-based approach, the audience feels like he is one of them. Second: He uses humor to cut to the chase about painful changes in the market, with audience-specific examples. He connects the dots and provides perspective in a way that challenges the audience's thinking. He is irreverent without trying and optimistic without being naïve.

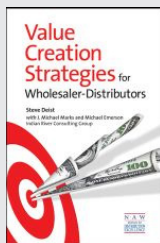
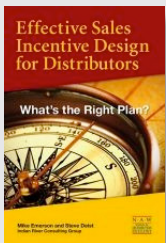


He has worked for hundreds of distributor, retail, manufacturer and private equity clients in dozens of lines of trade. Mike is a trusted advisor to senior executives, a permanent University of Innovative Distribution faculty member and a distribution company board director. He is the Senior Research Fellow for the NAW Institute for Distribution Excellence. He is a grandfather and a competitive road racer at the national level.

Mike's speaking engagements have included webinars, workshops, technical sessions for management-level audiences, strategic sessions for executive-level audiences and keynote speeches. Mike will tailor the topics in duration and content to the needs of the client and agenda. Each will include examples that are industry-specific and relevant to the audience to maximize takeaway value.

"A crowd-pleaser and a real joy to watch." - Association Executive

Books by Mike Marks



Published by the
National Association
of Wholesaler-
Distributors

Sample of Prior Speaking Clients

Activant Solutions
AMAROK
Associated Equipment Distributors
Affiliated Distributors
American Supply Association
Association for High Technology Distribution
Door & Hardware Institute
Electro Federation
Health Industry Distributors Association Foundation
Irrigation Association
Material Handling Equipment Distributors Association
Modern Distribution Management
National Electronic Distributors Association
National Association of Electrical Distributors
National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors
NPTA Alliance
National Wood Flooring Association
Pro-Link
Specialty Tools & Fasteners Distributors Association
University of Innovative Distribution (UID)

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www.ircg.com

“Once again, you pulled off another informative and eye-opening session ... The interactive sessions were definitely a plus.”

- Association Executive

Popular Speaking Topics

Managing in Turbulent Times: Will There Be Branches?

The distribution industry is in a race to the bottom on price with new nontraditional competitors like broadline box movers and Amazon. The consolidation trend is forcing distributors to realign their suppliers, and manufacturers to realign their distributors. The distinctions between distributors and manufacturers are evaporating as both migrate into roles of brand managers. Throw in some technology and an aging workforce in transition, and things get interesting.

The model that Peter Drucker put forward in 1980, under this same title, still holds true today. We are in touch with our current challenges and forget that there were similar times of stress and disruption throughout history. What Drucker examined were the firms that grew and prospered through these times and what they had in common. This is not a presentation about the future or what is going to happen. Rather, it is a discussion about what actions were taken by the leaders that prospered in the past.

It is often easy to see patterns missed with hindsight and there will be actions discussed that fall into three categories.

1. Ensure your capacity for survival with enough strength to weather a blow
2. Ensure your ability to recognize needed change and adapt quickly
3. Ensure the boldness necessary to exploit emerging opportunities

Westinghouse was broken up in the late 1980s due to the tremendous blow it took on leveraged debt and credit services; Kodak filed bankruptcy because it failed at the second criteria even though it invented the digital camera; and Ciba, the world share leader in hard contacts, lost its position to J&J because it thought soft contacts were just a low-margin fad.

With an update for today's challenges, this session examines decision-making, scenario development, risk assessment and tools that separate the direction of the tide from the size of the waves. Nothing in today's environment is easy, but a set of properly applied tools can help reduce the chaos.

The Sales Force of the Future: What Does Your Customer Really Want and Need?

The promise of technology is seductive. Executives see demonstrations of powerful capabilities and are told that all this can be yours with an investment. Tablets, smartphones, mobile apps, location apps, social marketing, and, of course, Customer Relationship Management systems (CRM) all offer new capabilities.

An aging sales force is driving this interest. Executives are concerned with losing customer relationship equity and knowledge as aging reps retire. Many are finding it challenging to find a new model for recruiting and growing expertise in young sales reps. There is a great deal of focus on the wrong things, and many executives are missing the huge industry change that faces most markets today. A tidal wave of changing customer behaviors is having a huge impact on the role required of the distributor sales force.

In the beginning the industry had self-directed sales reps who could “eat what they killed.” They sold themselves first to earn and build relationships and trust. Then they differentiated themselves by selling service. Over the decades this role has evolved into one of protecting an existing flow of business with an established account deck. The majority of growth is generated by critical events with existing customers around competi-



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“Your presentation
received rave reviews.”
- Association Executive

tor product or supplier failure. This remains a critical role but has morphed at a tactical level to align with changing customer expectations. Many of these changes have yet to be recognized by executive management.

More significant perhaps is the fact that the field sales generalist role has shown growth in productivity improvements three to five times faster than GDP growth. While technology companies take much of the credit it really has more to do with role specialization. Today’s generalist is supported by versions of a project management office, including inside sales technical specialists and quotation departments.

This session starts with the customer and what they really want. Mike will share real world industry-specific examples around how sales reps have responded effectively to the changes, sometimes in spite of their own management.

He will share a role specialization map that participants can use to improve sales productivity, lower selling costs and increase customer switching costs. His presentation will be practical, providing distributors with actionable solutions.

Consolidation in Wholesale Distribution: What is the Best Size to Be or Not to Be?

Consolidation means to make something stronger. In an industry, it is measured by concentration. Typically in most wholesale distribution industries, this is the share of industry revenues by the 10 largest distributors. As this percentage increases it produces many structural and competitive changes. While this is a favored topic of conversation it often misses the fact that it is really the aggregate effect of many buyers and sellers of businesses that create these large-scale changes.

Acquisitions in distribution have gone mainstream. Mike teaches a full-day class on this subject at Purdue’s University of Innovative Distribution (UID). It is now widely understood as a viable and effective tool for both revenue growth and growth in shareholder value. While this activity continues to increase, it does raise a few intriguing questions.

- Why have some of the really large rollups failed or ended up spinning off previous acquisitions?
- When looking at industry PAR reports, why has there never been a clear relationship between larger size and higher profit?
- As this continues, will each distribution channel end up with only a handful of large firms that are “too big to fail?”

If the only tool that you have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail. Acquisitions are an important tool in a large toolbox, but they are not the only tool.

The reality is that scale produces disadvantages, as well. This session provides senior executives with a model to help understand how these market forces affect the competitive environment. At a practical level there is a question around how hard do you need to work for your money. It is always harder for small firms that have limited resources and limited opportunities. It is also hard, or at least frustrating, to be large and find out how hard it is to change anything that challenges the corporate immune system.

Participants will be able to use this model to evaluate their own competitive situation with respect to aligning market forces like customer and supplier market power, competitive intensity and barriers to entry for new competitors or new products. With this understanding, informed choices can be made in both organizational structure, investment priorities and finding the right balance between centralized and decentralized control systems.



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“Your session was definitely one of the highlights of our meetings.”

- Association Executive

Creating Competitive Advantage Today: Why Should Customers Choose You Over Others?

Competitive advantage is measured by how obvious and easy it is for a customer to choose you over your competitors. Living in a high-intensity price-driven landscape is a sign that no one firm has a clear competitive advantage over their competitors. Competitive advantage is defined by your customers. It is measured by a distributor by being able to extract a price premium from customers, or achieving a cost advantage over competitors. This is typically only achieved by the top performers within the top quartile industry financial benchmarking reports, i.e. the best of the best.

Cost advantages come from operating scale, role specialization and performance management processes. Price advantages come from scale with suppliers, mass customization and leveraging competitive intensity. Selling service with excellent staff is a high-risk strategy unless the customer, not the supplier, clearly sees a difference and is willing to pay a price premium.

In the early go-go days of distribution generalist sales reps on commission went out to sell themselves first and build trusting relationships around providing service to create ongoing revenue streams for their employer. For many firms the competitive advantage was primarily the strength of the relationship between a sales representative and their customer. This is still a viable business model in some industries. In others it has been pushed to the side and is relevant to only small customers.

The real questions are around how true competitive advantage is created in today's changing market? This session examines the common paths and actions taken by those distributors that have achieved their own market dominance. Mike will draw from past and current Indian River clients who generate an EBITDA return on sales over 10% and growth rates 2 to 3 times the market. One shared theme by all is a powerful but subtle shift from defining themselves by what they sell to defining themselves by who they sell to, their customers. This is the foundation to support their transitions from a vendor to a supplier to a partner in the minds of their customers.

Along the way these distributors increase their importance and relevance to their customers, which also increases the customer's supplier switching costs. Distributor margin is defined by customer switching costs; low margins accompany low switching costs. Why do these customers allow it to happen? It is not about the distributor margin in a win-lose negotiation. It is about the distributor's ability to lower the customers' cost, and improve the customers' competitive position.



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