

Vidacare taps into power of specialty representation

Vidacare Executive Vice President and co-founder Jim Thomsen faced some tough choices when he considered how to bring his company's EZ-IO® product system to market. There was no question that, like most innovative medical technologies, EZ-IO would demand hands-on selling by knowledgeable, technically sophisticated salespeople.

EZ-IO was formed around technology from the University of Texas in San Antonio. It provides for the rapid, secure and safe delivery of intraosseous drugs and fluids. "Intraosseous" means "inside the bone," and it is employed when existing methods of vascular access (intravenous, or "inside the vein" delivery) are challenging or even impossible -- which is often the case with trauma patients, whose veins may have collapsed. "Any long bone, such as the tibia or humerus, is really a large, non-collapsible vein," says Thomsen. With EZ-IO, the provider can drill into the bone and deliver drugs and fluids. The process sounds painful, but isn't.

The technology was truly innovative, but still, the question remained: How to bring it to the pre-hospital and critical-care markets?

Thomsen rejected general-line distributors, because he doubted they could do the kind of hands-on selling that EZ-IO called for. So he considered other options. "I could have formed a strategic alliance with a large manufacturer, but I didn't want to do that, because you give up the store," he says. Nor did he want to raise the cash to field a direct sales force.

Having worked with specialty distributors before, and even having founded two specialty distributor organizations in the past, Thomsen was familiar with their capabilities. "They're not order-takers," he says. "They can create markets where there are none, through pure sales efforts." He knew many of the players already, particularly those who specialized in anesthesia/respiratory, ICU/CCU and the emergency department. He called them up, and he exhibited at the IMDA Manufacturers Forum in 2003. The results? Vidacare's sales in Year 1 exceeded \$1.25 million -- outstanding for a startup company. In its second year, 2006, sales jumped to almost \$6 million. And the company forecast 2007 sales of \$15 million.

"Specialty sales companies are my sales organization," says Thomsen. "They have a major impact on our company."

For information on how IMDA members can create a market for your innovative technology, contact IMDA at (866) IMDA-YES.

If you manufacture a commodity, call a general-line distributor. But if your product is truly innovative, contact IMDA.