

Member Profile: Michael Estrin, CLMR

Owner of Estrin Sales Agency Michael Estrin, CLMR, currently serves as chair of the ALA Board of Governors. Over the years, he has served on various ALA committees and has been involved in the development of many of association initiatives. Estrin recently shared some insight on his experiences in the industry and as a member of ALA for the association's new, member profile series, which will highlight some of the many members who dedicate their time to help improve the association.

How did you get your start in the lighting industry?

I am the third generation in my family to be in the electrical/lighting industry. My grandfather owned an electrical supply house, my dad owned two lighting showrooms in down-state New York, and I am a manufacturers' rep. I first went to work for my uncle, who was also a manufacturers' rep, for about a year, then I worked for Quoizel, and later, I had the opportunity to start my own agency, which was really put into business by Kichler Lighting.

What has changed in the industry since you started?

There are three distinct things that have changed dramatically. The first is that when I began, there were not rep agencies in the business; it was more individuals representing different lines. When I started my agency, I had decided that I didn't want to just rep individual lines, I wanted to be more of a company and add people to my organization. Today, most reps have moved to that format, and are parts of agencies with multiple people doing different things, who all benefit the distributor and the manufacturer for whom they work.

The second thing that has changed greatly is computerization and technology, which shifted the focus of my job. Originally, I would go into a lighting showroom and take inventory to see what the showroom had in stock, and on display, make sure that they knew what they didn't have on display, and show them new things. Then, we would write an order and come back in six weeks to do it again. Nowadays, showrooms are computerized, so they are able to write their own business, and reps are more promoters of products. As a rep, you now need to provide a higher level of service that is different from the service of 20 years ago. Today, showrooms really need people who help them make a sale. They need someone who can do things like answer a question about a product or teach them about an LED from a certain manufacturer. There are a lot of good people selling products, but they don't always know the right answers for a particular product manufacturer, and it's my job to help provide those answers.

The last thing that has changed is kind of the obvious one, and that is LED technology. When LEDs first started to come in vogue, I was fortunate enough to be on the forefront of that, because the product line I represented at the time was an early seller of LED downlights. LED technology has changed the entire focus of how we sell product, the designs of the product, and more.

What challenges do you think the industry is facing today?

With the advent of the Internet, people are now shopping for products online, and then going to a store to see them or get advice. Sometimes they buy the product from the Internet, and other times from the store. Today, everyone has to have an online presence. By not having things like an online shopping cart, retailers risk someone going elsewhere to buy the product that minute. Retailers also have to find a way to set themselves apart. They need to get more people into their space to be able to differentiate themselves from the impersonal online purchasing experience. They need to find the value added, which will be something different for each individual showroom.

What is a lesson you have learned during your career that you would share with someone just starting out?

It's really simple – in one sentence – be good to people, be helpful to people. That is all I do, because in business, you have to be really good at a lot of things and excellent at one thing. Everyone has to figure out what they're going to be good at and what they're going to be excellent at, and then translate it so that people can understand it.

What benefits has ALA brought to your career?

The connection to people in our industry from places outside of the norm. I have friendships with dealers around the United States and Canada, reps and manufacturers. Knowing all of these people has benefited me greatly. Every person has a different idea, a different opinion.

ALA has also benefitted me by giving me the opportunity to visit Washington, D.C., and participate in the fly-ins with our congressmen and senators, which is just a great civics lesson. It's an amazing experience to be able to talk with the movers and shakers in our country.

Overall, ALA has given me the opportunity to get my brand out to many people locally in my territory that I'd never planned on. I originally joined ALA to give something back to the industry that's been so good to me, and I believe I've gotten more from it than I've given.



Four Ways to Use ALA's Lighting Trends Videos

The 2016 ALA lighting trends videos are available on ALA's website and YouTube page. Produced by the ALA BiNational Advertising and PR Program, as well as *Better Homes and Gardens*, the videos offer members easy-to-implement added value for their customers. "The ALA videos bring the product to life for us," said Denise Duncan, general manager of Lighting Etc. "They provide an opportunity for showrooms to share our industry's innovation with our social media audiences." Here are four ways members can use these videos to enhance their online presence.

1. Post them on social media.

Videos make perfect content for social media. The lighting trends videos are quick to watch, visually engaging, and informative making social media followers more likely to click and view the post.

2. Use them to supplement blog content.

Developing and posting new content to an online blog can be time consuming and difficult.



These videos can be used as guides to develop written content for ALA members' blogs, then posted along with the content to add visual interest and examples.

3. Embed them on a website.

Through the YouTube links for the lighting trends videos, members can easily embed them on their websites. Showroom members may find this particularly helpful for inspiring website visitors and potential customers to update their lighting design.

4. Include them in email marketing campaigns.

ALA members with databases of customers and potential leads can use these videos for email marketing campaigns. A customer who is on the fence about purchasing new lighting may view these videos and feel inspired by the new trends and beautiful photos to update their lighting.