Related Careers
Sales representatives must have sales ability and knowledge of the products they sell. Other occupations that require similar skills include advertising, marketing, promotions, public relations, and sales managers; insurance sales agents; purchasing managers, buyers, and purchasing agents; real estate brokers and sales agents; retail salespersons; sales engineers; and securities, commodities, and financial services sales agents.

Resources
- SalesJobs.com www.salesjobs.com
- Manufacturers’ Agents National Association www.manaonline.org
- Manufacturers’ Representatives Educational Research Foundation www.mrerf.org

Sources of information for this publication:
2010-2011 Occupational Outlook Handbook
0*Net Online, online.onetcenter.org/
2007 Salary Survey

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Sales is a broad field of business that spans almost every industry. Retail, wholesale and sales engineers all target different audiences to interest customers in their product and address any concerns or questions. Depending on the industry, sales representatives may work more than 40 hours per week because of the nature of the work and the amount of travel. Retail salespersons assist customers in finding what they are looking for and try to interest them in buying the merchandise. Most are able to describe a product’s features, demonstrate its use, or show various models and colors. Wholesale and manufacturing sales representatives primary duties are to make wholesale and retail buyers and purchasing agents interested in their merchandise and to address any of their clients’ questions and concerns. Sales representatives demonstrate their products and explain how using those products can benefit the customer. Sales engineers work with the production, engineering, or research and development departments of their companies, or with independent sales firms, to determine how products and services could be designed or modified to suit customers’ needs. They also may advise customers on how best to use the products or services provided.

Skills and Abilities
Sales representatives should be goal oriented, persuasive, and able to work well both independently and as part of a team. A pleasant personality and appearance, the ability to communicate well with people, and problem-solving skills are highly valued. Patience and perseverance are also keys to completing a sale. Sales representatives also need to be able to work with computers since computers are increasingly used to place and track orders and to monitor inventory levels.

Majors at MU
- Agribusiness Management (CAFNR)
- Business Administration (BUS)
- Textile and Apparel Management (HES)
- Journalism (JOURN)
- Economics (A&S)
- Communication (A&S)

Preparation
- Education varies by industry, but having a bachelor’s degree can be highly desirable, especially for sales representatives who work with technical and scientific products.
- Some employers hire individuals with previous sales experience who lack a college degree.
- A bachelor’s degree in engineering or other technical degree usually is required to become a sales engineer.
- Many sales representatives attend seminars in sales techniques or take courses in marketing, economics, communication, or even a foreign language to provide the extra edge needed to make sales. Often, companies have formal training programs for beginning sales representatives lasting up to 2 years.

Typical Career Opportunities
- Sales Representative
- Sales Engineer
- Pharmaceutical Sales Representative
- Sales Agent
- Territory Manager
- Business Development Executive

Career Information
Employment is expected to grow as fast as the average for sales representatives. This is primarily because of continued growth in the variety and number of goods sold throughout the economy. Employment opportunities may fluctuate from year to year because sales are affected by changing economic conditions, legislative issues, and consumer preferences. Competition for high-paying jobs is expected, but opportunities will be best for those with a college degree, the appropriate technical expertise, and the personal traits necessary for successful selling.

Compensation methods for sales representatives vary significantly by the type of company and the product sold. Most employers use a combination of salary and commissions or salary plus bonus. Depending on the type of product or products they are selling, their experience in the field, and the number of clients they have, they can earn significantly more or less than those working in direct sales for a manufacturer or wholesaler. Median hourly earnings of retail salespersons, including commissions, were $9.86 per hour in May 2008. Sales representatives and sales engineers’ median annual earnings were $70,200 and $83,100, respectively, in May 2008.