



## SPECIALTY EQUIPMENT MARKET ASSOCIATION

### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE 2019 ELECTION YEAR**

# **LES RUDD**

## **Part 1 – Personal/Professional History**

1. Please provide a history of your professional background and education (including professional development). Feel free to attach your resume and/or Bio. Describe the specifics of your current job responsibilities:

My first experience in the automotive industry was at the age of 16 as that of an enthusiast, NHRA drag racer and hot rodder. While attending the University of Georgia as a wildlife biologist (go figure), I began to work in an automotive warehouse, this propelled me to the traditional automotive retail store and then to a combo store that was both a speed shop and a traditional auto parts store. At Bloomfield Auto Parts and Speed, I quickly became the assistant manager at a ripe age of 20. These foundational years were the time I was able to glean from an entrepreneur the key areas of repeat customers, loyalty, struggles of an owner and the basic business items of turns, margin, cash flow and profitability.

The January before my 21st birthday I had the opportunity to relocate from Georgia to Mississippi to begin working with TCI Automotive under Raymond King, Amy Faulk and the late Bill Taylor. Over the next few years I moved through the ranks at TCI, settling as the national sales manager. These years, under great leadership, allowed me to learn many aspects of marketing, WD programs, manufacturing and warehouse management. These years were tremendous preparation for the opportunity that was soon to come. At TCI, I was able to travel across the country and Canada working shows and races, and visiting distributors both large and small. These “road miles” allowed me to meet some of the key people in our industry while still in my “early years,” the most influential of these being Bob Cook.

In 1992, I was afforded the chance to join Bob Cook Sales. At that time, I must say that I had no idea that step would lead me to where I am today. I have had the chance to meet and be mentored by some of the most influential people in our industry—many of whom are in the SEMA Hall of Fame and many more who will one day be there themselves. Bob allowed me to follow his shadow while mentoring me in the key areas of what it really meant to “represent” our clients to the fullest. He always pushed me to volunteer inside our industry in order to “give back” to the industry that has given to me. In 2006, I was honored to be partnered with John Clark and Jeff Bates as we purchased the agency from Bob. Some eight years later, in January 2014, I became the president of our agency; I

cannot explain what a humbling moment that was.

Today I am blessed to guide what I consider the best group in the industry. My “day-to-day” activities range from the business management (cash flow, profits, contract negotiations, P&L management, Insurance, etc.) to sales manager aspects (guiding the team, motivation, education, incentives, travel arrangements, etc.) to a manufacturers’ rep (logistics planning, sales training, sales, inventory management, report reviews, manufacturer collaboration). I am as comfortable in the boardroom of a billion-dollar retailer and the office of a major e-tailer as I am in a one-man engine shop or family-owned truck accessory store.

Professional History:

Bob Cook Sales: 1992–current

TCI Automotive: 1986–1992

Education/Certifications:

CPMR–Certified Professional Manufacturers Rep through MRERF and Arizona State

Dale Carnegie

University of Georgia, Wildlife Biology Major (no degree)

Central Macon High School, Macon, Georgia, class of 1982, honors graduate

2. Indicate your historic and/or current involvement with automotive industry initiatives specifically, as well as other professional and philanthropic associations, societies and organizations you have been actively involved in. Please be specific about other boards (if any) on which you have served or are currently serving:

SEMA Board of Directors:2016–current

SEMA Communications Task Force

SEMA Show Committee

SEMA Show Rules Enforcement Task Force

SEMA Sidecar Participant

SEMA Manufacturers’ Rep Network Chair (term expired June 2016), Immediate Past Chair (term expired June 2018)

SEMA MRN Select Committee from 2006–June 2018

SEMA Town Halls: attended seven in last three years

SEMA PAC Member

SEMA Manufacturers’ Rep Council Chair and Immediate Past Chair (term expired 2004)

SEMA MRC Select Committee from 1998–Chair in 2004

WD of the Year Committee

SEMA/SDC Certified

PWA Rep Liaison to the PWA Board of Directors (2013–2016)

FLW/TBF Area President past–2012)

BASS/TBF Area President past–2009

CLC Discipleship Coach–: two separate one-year terms

CLC Director of Men’s Ministry 2007–2012

Served in multiple capacities with many manufacturer clients and distributor customers

as Long-Rang Planning Committees, Steering Committees and Product Focus Groups

3. Please highlight specific career accomplishments including, but not limited to, patents received, product innovations, awards and recognitions, publications, marketing or business programs, presentation to business and/or industry symposiums. Share any and all significant or notable accomplishments:

- CPMR–Certified Professional Manufacturers Rep through MRERF and Arizona State
- Numerous Rep of the Year awards from distributor clients
- Numerous Sales recognition awards from manufacturers
- Multiple PWA recognition of service awards
- Participation in numerous panels, roundtables, education programs
- 2017 PWA Person of the Year
- Member of Bob Cook Sales for six SEMA Rep of the Year awards
- Goodguys Pros Pick build 2007 and 2008
- *Super Chevy* Editor’s Choice 2008
- *Super Chevy* Outstanding ’55 Award 2008
- 2004 obtained Partner status at Bob Cook Sales
- 2006 became Principal Partner at Bob Cook Sales
- 2014 became President at Bob Cook Sales
- Part of original group under the SEMA Liaison leadership of Ellen McKoy to found the Manufacturers’ Rep Council
- SEMA MRC Chair and Immediate Past Chair 2002–2006
- SEMA MRN Chair and Immediate Past Chair 2014–2018
- SEMA PAC Presidents Club

4. Please mark each of the skill categories where you believe you possess a level of expertise:

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| <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Distribution/Logistics</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supply Chain</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Engineering</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Vehicular/Product Design/Innovation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Product Management</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> OEM Design/Technology</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brand Management</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advertising</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Marketing</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public Relations</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Crisis Management</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Regulatory Compliance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Legislative/Lobbying</p> | <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Motor Sports/Racing</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vehicle Shows/Auctions/Exhibitions</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Financial Planning/Management</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Accounting</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Human Resources Management</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Business Management/ Development</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sales</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Business Technology</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Data Management</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Internet Utilization</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify):</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> |
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## Part 2 – Personal/Professional Attributes

5. What are your specific areas of expertise? What unique skills or perspective do you think you could bring to the leadership of SEMA? What business or life experience do you have that prepares you to help shape the direction of the industry? What industry issues are you particularly passionate about?

Peers, clients, customers and friends have often noted to me that my unique skills include leadership, organization, the ability to recognize the white elephant in the room, strategic thinking, being comfortable in uncomfortable situations, and not afraid to ask the hard questions while in a meeting.

My specific areas of expertise would have to be relationship management, simplifying the complex and instinctive resolution-based thinking.

My life experiences have ranged from executive boardrooms to small shops. I have spent time in the presence of many of our industry's most powerful people and handed out food to the needy in freezing rain. I have worked on a drag car on the muddy ground of a race track, assembled street cars on lifts in an air-conditioned shop and given out free oil changes in a parking lot for needy moms and the elderly. I've watched small shops struggle, inventors flourish and some of our largest manufacturers go away because they weren't watching the changes of our industry. I watched a father die from leukemia, watched a miracle baby be born, held the hand of a husband as his wife passed away and hugged a cocaine addict an entire night so tight it left bruises & so that this person would not cause himself personal injury. I'm not sure if this qualifies for leadership or a place on the SEMA Board of Directors, but I do hope it shows my heart, dedication and integrity when I make a commitment.

The rate of change is overwhelming in this age. In turn, we must, as an industry be nimble as we move forward. Key issues that I consider to be close to my heart are: education to both the youth of our industry and those currently involved; preserving the heritage our industry and association was built on while propelling ourselves forward in technology; maintaining and growing the entrepreneurial spirit of the new exhibitors to the Show every year while increasing their success and the retention rate of these exhibitor; keeping a close eye on Washington and the OEs to ensure that neither legislation nor restriction hamper our companies; continue to grow the SDC as this is a lifeblood of our future; and lastly, don't forget the little guy of our industry that really has no idea what SEMA is or does.

6. What would you say is/are your most notable achievement(s) to this point in your career? What are you most proud of?

What I am most proud of in life would be my relationship with Jesus Christ my savior, followed by the fact that I have a great family followed then by the opportunity to be involved with great mentors and people of this industry that I am able to call friends.

As for my career, one of the top items would have to be being able to serve on the SEMA

Board these last years. You see, in 2004 I was offered a nomination to run for the SEMA Board of Directors. At that time, I turned it down due to the fact that John Clark, Jeff Bates and I were beginning our planning and contractual relationships with Bob Cook as partners and future owners of the agency. I just couldn't ignore the commitment to stand next to my partners thru everything that came along. When I turned down that nomination, I was told I would never have the chance to run again for the Board of Directors—well, I guess I outlasted the naysayers.

Other key achievements;

- Being National Sales Manager at TCI while only 24 years old, which included developing a cataloging and part-numbering system that is still used today.
- Being part of the initial group of rep leaders that began the forming of MRC while at a Chicago Meeting with Ellen McKoy as our SEMA liaison.
- Receiving my CPMR certification.
- Being partnered with two fantastic men to acquire Bob Cook Sales.
- Being part of the team that recognized it was time to redesign the MRC and become the MRN.
- Being elected twice by my peers to chair their SEMA council/network.
- \* Being chosen as the PWA Person of the Year by the distributors that we at BCS have served.
- \* Being honored by my peers to be chosen to the MRN Rep Hall of Fame.
- \* Being able to lead my team to the stage at the 2018 SEMA Banquet to accept our seventh SEMA Rep Agency of the Year award and address the crowd.

### Part 3—Industry Perspective

7. What do you consider to be the top opportunities or threats facing the specialty parts aftermarket over the next five years? Try to be specific to industry trends. You may comment on macroeconomic issues (inflation, unemployment, health care, etc.) but only if they are relevant to your perspective on industry issues.

Threat: An adage has often been quoted in times of battle and major change: "*We have met the enemy and once again, HE IS US.*" So, the key item I see that we must get a grip on is *us*.

When looking back, as a reference to be aware of where we came from—i.e., the reason the rearview mirror is way smaller than the windshield—is to recall that PRI never existed until SEMA allowed them to. We must ensure that the vision to move forward and our mission statement to "help our members businesses succeed and prosper"—does the best to be inclusive of *all* members. or at least the majority—not just the large and popular.

Threat: government/EPA/tariffs, etc. Fortunately, we have a great D.C. office and great legal staff to guide us on this path through the maze of bureaucracy. Many threats at many levels can easily topple a sector or a large part of our industry. We must keep this as a key guiding point of our compass.

Opportunity—Youth and young-adult development. Wow—we have made great strides and great action to bring this sector to a whole new level. We must keep these initiatives on

path, moving forward and growing!

Opportunity/threat—new markets (electric, autonomy, ADAS, UTV, Outlander): All areas we need to keep a pulse on to see where they fit with us and us with them.

8. Of the issues you identify above, which ONE concerns you the most as to how it will impact the industry's future? What would you do to initiate change to either expedite a positive outcome or prevent a potential disaster?

Today, since I have been preparing for a SEMA Show Committee call, I can't help but be concerned of the possible alienation of categories of our industry that drive them to establish another show, event, association, etc.

SEMA is way more than a show—so, therefore, we have all the tools, personnel and financial resources to prevent these types of moves while at the same time having these same resources to cultivate, nurture and grow segments of our industry that feel they have lost or are losing their position in the food chain of our industry.

#### Part 4 – Association Specific Observations

9. Do you feel that the Board of Directors and SEMA are currently pursuing the initiatives that are critical to our business segment? What would you place more emphasis on? What would you discontinue? What would you add?

Yes. Being currently on the Board, I feel the group of initiatives we currently have in place are very conducive to where the industry is and where we are going.

I do believe a new focus should be to review the current councils and networks to see if each of them should stay the same, morph, change, evolve or possibly not exist. I believe this sector is key for all our major volunteers, but to my knowledge has not had a deep-dive, reconstructive review since many of these were actually formed.

Lastly, my questionnaire from 2016 had this comment, and I see we are inching closer to it being "fact": I would keep the pedal down for A mid-U.S. SEMA Garage location.

10. As a SEMA Board member how do you feel you would be uniquely qualified to help address the issues you identified above?

I personally feel that no segment of the industry has more interaction with all segments of our industry more so than a manufacturers' rep—from boardrooms to engine shops, mom-and-pop stores to the largest e-commerce, entrepreneurs whose passion and hobby is their life, to private-equity management teams, to the old and famous racer to the kid at his first car show—it's what I do every day. I get mad, I smile, I cry and I pray based on what I see every day. I wouldn't change it for the world. But, the finite vastness of our industry needs folks like me who see more than glass walls of a conference room and someone that touches folks that are struggling to stay relevant. I have been in this industry for nearly 40 years and worked in most every segment.

11. What do you see as SEMA's weaknesses?

- Can we be too large?
- Ignoring key segments
- The continued struggle to get the "little guys" to realize that SEMA is more than a Show—and is here to help—but they must ask!

12. How about its strengths?

The people are the key strength of SEMA. SEMA continues to cultivate and grow an elite group of volunteers, staff, leadership and Board members. It simply does not exist without the people.

13. If you were chosen to chair the Long-Range Planning Committee, which topics or issues would you want your committee to be deliberating on?

- How do we grow without alienating?
- Council and network overview.
- Maintain and growth of youth and young adult enhancement.
- Expanding SEMA's footprint out of California and outside the United States.
- Identifying and growing subcultures inside and around our industry.

## Part 5 – About You

14. Questionnaires can be very limiting. In the space below, share with us anything we didn't ask that you believe will help the Nominating Committee develop a better understanding of you as a candidate:

1. I truly love this industry. Very few people in this world can take a hobby and passion and turn it into a career. I believe I can set an example and encourage someone else to stick through the tough times of growing in this industry to see the true benefits it had to offer.
2. I have been blessed to be raised in a family and mentored through an industry of people that truly reinforced the value of "giving back." My goal is to give back to an industry that has given so much to me.
3. I am not afraid to ask the hard questions or recognize the white elephant in the room. At the end of the day, I must be able to look myself in the mirror and ask the question, "Did I do all I could do today?"
4. I strive every day to take the high road and, yes, I fall short often—but when the day ends, I can tell you that the standards I place upon myself are harder and higher than anyone can place upon me.