



SPECIALTY EQUIPMENT MARKET ASSOCIATION

BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE 2021 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 résumé and/or Bio. Describe the specifics of your current job responsibilities:

I am currently 56 years old; I have only worked at eight places in the last 38 years and two in the last 35 years. All of these, except for parts manager for 90 days at a tractor dealership at the age of 20, have been in the automotive aftermarket industry; in essence, the only industry I know.

I started my automotive career like many—in the back of a warehouse. I quickly moved to the front counter then to delivery. I was offered a position at a medium-sized retail store where I started at the counter and then quickly promoted to assistant manager. Shortly thereafter, I moved to a larger retail/speed shop operation, one of three under the same owner, where within 10 months I was promoted to full manager of this location. These first three years in the marketplace were a fast-paced, hands-on education of customer service, customer loyalty, GMROI, margin, cash flow and P&L management, to name a few. During this same period, I raced a Super Street drag car that I owned and drove a Super Gas car in the Southeast regions. The relationships I developed from my retail customers and my drag-race relationships led me to the opportunity to join TCI Automotive.

The January before my 22nd birthday I relocated from Georgia to Mississippi and began working with TCI under Raymond King, Amy Faulk and the late Bill Taylor. Amy was the first to encourage me to “get involved with SEMA” where I first enlisted as a member of YEN. 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 North America working shows, races and visiting our distributors both large and small. These “road miles” allowed me to meet and become befriended by some of my most influential industry mentors—the most influential of these being Bob Cook.

In 1992 I was offered 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 which are in the SEMA Hall of Fame and many more that 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 to “give back” to the industry that has given to me. In 2003, I was honored to become Bob’s first partner at BCS. In 2006, myself, John Clark and Jeff Bates 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 for me.

Today I am blessed to guide what I consider the best group in the industry. My “day-to-day” activities range from 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 manufacturers’ rep—logistics planning, sales training, sales, inventory management, report reviews, ACES/PIES, manufacturer collaboration, etc.

Professional History:

Bob Cook Sales—1992—current
TCI Automotive—1986—1992

Education/Certifications:

CPMR—Certified Professional Manufacturers Rep through MRERF and Arizona State (the second rep in SEMA to achieve this certification)
Multiple Dale Carnegie, ZIG Ziglar and CPSP classes
SEMA/SDC Certified
University of GA—Wildlife Biologist
Central Macon High School, Macon, GA—1982 with Honors

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—Manufacturers Rep Network—Chair (term expired June 2016)
SEMA—Manufacturers Rep Council—Past Chairman (term expired 2004)
SEMA MRC/MRN—served on Select Committee from 1998 through Chair in 2016
SEMA WD of the Year Committee
PWA/CAN Rep Liaison to the Board of Directors (2013—2018)
FLW/TennBassFederation—Area President (2009—2012)
B.A.S.S./TBF—Area President (past through 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 LRPs, 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:

- SEMA Board of Directors, 2016–current
- 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
- Member of Bob Cook Sales for five of our seven 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
- 2003, obtained Partner status at Bob Cook Sales
- 2006, became Principal Partner at Bob Cook Sales
- 2014, President of Bob Cook Sales

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

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

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?

First, I must give the disclaimer that it is not my normal personality to award myself a title of expert in anything. There may be others that feel or believe I may be an expert, but for me, I feel there is always room to learn, always room to grow and I never believe I am the smartest person in a room.

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, remaining comfortable in uncomfortable situations, and not afraid to ask the hard questions while in a meeting.

I have been told that my specific areas of expertise would be relationship management, simplifying the complex and instinctive resolution-based thinking.

My life experiences have ranged from executive board rooms 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 racetrack, 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 have watched small shops struggle, inventors flourish and some of our industry's largest manufacturers go away because they were not watching the changes of our industry and the world around them. I watched a father die from leukemia, watched a miracle baby be born, held the hand of a man as his wife died, and hugged a cocaine addict an entire night so tight it left bruises to keep them from clawing themselves. I am not sure if this qualifies for leadership or to be SEMA's next chair-elect, but I do hope it shows my heart, my dedication and my integrity when I make a commitment.

The rate of change is overwhelming in this age. The end of the COVID-19 era and the beginning of post-COVID-19 marketplace will need much thought, attention and quick, risky-judgment decisions.

Core industry issues (in no particular order) include:

- Youth engagement.
- Enhanced OE relationship with a focus to ADAS.
- Assuring our PRI tribe is protected, informed and nurtured as a key part of SEMA.
- Frontline technology expansion.
- Reinforce the relationship of SEMA (the association) to our industry.
- Maintain and grow the entrepreneurial spirit of the new exhibitors to the Show every year while increasing their success and the retention.
- Keep a close watch on government affairs, D.C., and the OE's to ensure that neither legislation nor restrictions hamper our industry's development.
- Get in front of the EV movement.
- Continue to grow, enhance and expand the SEMA Data Co-op (SDC)—as data is a lifeblood to our industry.
- Never forget the little guy! Remember, we all started somewhere.

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

At the top of the list of late would simply be having this opportunity to complete this form and to have a chance to run as the next chair-elect of SEMA.

Next, for the industry, would be the fact of being able to serve two terms on the Board of Directors.

Other key achievements:

- Being national Sales Manager at TCI while only 24 years old.
- Being part of the initial group of manufacturers' rep leaders that began the forming of MRC while at a Chicago meeting with Ellen McKoy as our SEMA liaison.
- Receiving my CPMR certification—only the second at its time in SEMA.
- 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—and then seeing the time was right to sunset this network. (There are too many programs that “hang on” at SEMA that truly need to be reevaluated and possibly ended!)
- Being elected twice by my peers to chair their SEMA council/network select committee.
- Being recognized by my peers to be inducted into the SEMA Rep Hall of Fame.

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.

To me, prior to looking too far down the road ahead of SEMA, we first must address some immediate items that are at the “tip of our nose.”

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic showed all of us that the world around us is unpredictable and ever-changing at a fast and constant rate. A lot of 2020 had our industry's members and SEMA in a reactive form versus proactive form. Therefore, I believe first we must address the elephant in the room of how we, SEMA the association, and the industry at large, prepare for the “new” market under the current and post COVID-19 changes, restrictions and human reactions. The SEMA Show is a key denominator in this equation, but the cracks in the foundation are the member companies that are struggling to recover and deal with these affects. As the Board, we should lead the decisions; we need to be nimble but proactive in decisions around this key issue.

When looking to threats and opportunities, I believe the association's staff and leaderships

vision can sometimes get blurred by forgetting that we have way more small companies striving to succeed than we do large multi-million-dollar members. Heck, there's thousands of industry companies that are not even members of SEMA that fall into this smaller demographic. With that being said, I see these next items, in order of my ranking of importance as key opportunities: (1) Autonomous vehicles, including ADAS into this sector, (2) Electrification, (3) EPA/environmental, (4) Complexity of vehicles and business, (5) Lack of youth engagement and lastly (6) a pending economic downturn.

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?

The reason I rank **AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES, INCLUDING ADAS**, as my number-one issue is that it will, either currently or the near future, affect every sector of our industry in some fashion. So many of our members hear this term but deeply have no idea of the immediate and long-lasting effects this has had, is having, and will continue to have for consumers and our industry members.

Imagine that it is 1967 and SEMA had the "magic" foresight to see into the current decade, 50 years ahead. What changes would that Board have made at every level of the market and government to circumvent what we now face against the EPA, CARB and other restrictions? It could have been a magical moment.

NOW—back to 2021—this is where we stand with autonomous/ADAS vehicles. Although this started in in the '80s the explosion has occurred in the early '00s. We must invest, educate litigate and broaden our scope of this sector. Our members and consumers do not even realize the affects many products are causing as the "codes" do not appear on the dash or even to common-mechanic scan tools. This issue is a lingering timebomb!

SEMA is making key strides in this area at both the California SEMA Garage and with our expansion to Detroit, but we need more attention, more experts, and a great alignment with the OEs and the regulatory channels. I would ensure that these initiatives continue but turn up the investment and education. I would also push for regional SEMA offices to have "feet on the street" educating and working with all sectors in all regions of our industry. We cannot sit back and wait for an annual or semi-annual event for information. This issue needs to be addressed daily with everything we are doing for our member companies to succeed and prosper.

(P.S., Electrification truly should be included in this same issue.)

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?

I have been involved as a volunteer for SEMA for more than 31 years, attending many Board meetings over the years. Of that, I have served on the Board of Directors since July 2016. I will speak direct and with pride sharing that the current Board of Directors has had more meetings, more cuts, more initiatives launched, and more set aside through this pandemic era than any others that I am aware of in three decades as a volunteer.

So, to answer the question—YES, I believe the current Board is pursuing the critical initiatives.

I mentioned previously my feeling and concerns for the autonomous/ADAS/electrification sectors. These need greater focus and more direct budgetary dollars as I mentioned earlier.

The strides and programs being made under the PRI (Performance Race Industry) are record-setting as well. I am proud to see what our Board is doing to ensure that the motorsports sector of our industry is always a key focus and never second fiddle to other sectors. The horizon for PRI under this new structure is exciting. If I am elected, I guarantee that this sector will always have a key focus and be near and dear to my heart, as this is where I started my involvement in this industry.

Fortunately for our members, the Board has worked diligently over that last year reviewing every program inside SEMA. We have now set a precedent for review that should be ongoing. I fully support cutting items that are outdated and no longer relevant. At the same time, it is always exciting to see what the councils, networks and staff are working towards with new programs, initiatives and ideas. I feel it is the leadership's responsibility to be good stewards of the funds at hand and to ensure to our members with confidence that we are budgeting to the needs and changes of our members and the industry.

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

I have been fortunate to have been employed in distribution, retail, manufacturing and service sectors of our industry. These past experiences allow me to have first-hand knowledge of where the strategic views of SEMA can reflect and relate to each sector.

As a manufacturers' rep, I am in a unique position to have regular contacts with companies that range from small entrepreneurial shops to major retailers, from niche manufacturers to multi-billion dollar conglomerates, from a single racer to large sanctioning bodies, from one-man ad agencies to the largest marketing companies in our industry. In turn, I would challenge that there are few that have this many touches, contacts and the ability to get a first-hand view of this vast range of membership.

Lastly, with over 30 years of volunteering inside SEMA, I have a real grassroots, working-

level relationship with all branches of SEMA and its staff.

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

There are so many items that are so great about what SEMA executes and provides for our members. However, if I had to point out an area where I believe we can do a better job, it would be with the smaller companies in the marketplace. We have made great strides, many through SDC, to work and associate to help the smaller members, but we need to do more. U.S. small businesses are getting hit hard, and our industry is no exception. Plus, there are thousands of small businesses in our niche that are not even SEMA members. I would love to see key focus initiatives laid out to target this sector of our industry. Most, if not all, of our major large members started out exceedingly small. This has not changed, and we need to work hard to help birth the next generation of large SEMA members.

12. How about its strengths?

SEMA has so many positive attributes it is ridiculously hard to sincerely pick one, or two or three. However, if I back away from the front lines and sincerely take a broad view of SEMA, its one true irreplaceable strength is our members. We are so fortunate that we have such a vast array of companies, products, designs, ideas, innovations and struggles, and yet can stand as one association. We cannot do this without our members.

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?

If I were chosen to chair the Long-range Planning Committee, I would like to see the group address the below listed topics and issues, *in addition to*, the ones previously mentioned above:

- Develop a team to evaluate the possibilities of regional SEMA offices to allow a closer touch to different geographical members.
- Initiate a review of the possibility of a specific council focused on resellers only in order to have a specific group to develop programs and initiatives for SEMA to assist resellers in their specific needs, desires and issues!
- Develop a program to increase our educational services to several times throughout the year, instead of only focusing most of them around the SEMA Show.
- Take a "clean-slate" deeper dive into all aspects of our marketing assets—website, *SEMA News*, *SEMA eNews* weekly updates, etc...
- Ensure that proper attention and forethought are laid out to improve and sustain SDC as best in class!

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:

- I genuinely love this industry. Very few people in this world can take a hobby and passion and then turn it into a career. I believe I can set an example and encourage others to stick through the tough times of growing in this industry to see the true benefits it has to offer.
- 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.
- 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?”*
- I strive every day to take the high road and, yes, I fall short often—but when the day ends, I attest that the standards I place upon myself are harder and higher than any human can place upon me.