



SUCCESS BY ASSOCIATION

As the industry changes, so do the companies in it. And while some no longer participate directly in retailing, as SIGMA members they see themselves being vitally involved with independent marketers.

"The industry is changing and some or many of our companies have to change with it," observes **Richard Salinsky**, president of **Best Petroleum Co., Inc.**, Lynn, Massachusetts. Now in his third decade of SIGMA membership, Salinsky's business has changed over the years and so has the nature of his involvement in fuel retailing. "But SIGMA is as important to me as ever," he says, "because while the principles of SIGMA are the same, the association is adapting to the changing needs of marketers today."

Salinsky sees himself being as highly involved in gasoline marketing as ever, though his focus today is less on direct retail operations and more on consulting. With all the changes in the industry, he is enthusiastic about using his 40 years of petroleum experience to help other marketers survive and thrive under today's market conditions.

"I feel that I'm very much a part of the petroleum marketing com-

munity," says Salinsky, "and that what I'm doing is my best contribution to the industry today. I'm probably having more impact now—and more fun—than ever. So I'm glad SIGMA has a place for me. It's the association that represents my interests. And I also continue to benefit from the camaraderie, the networking, and the information that I receive."

Salinsky is not alone. Other SIGMA members have also changed as industry conditions have altered their situations and opened up new opportunities. But though their participation in direct retail operations has been reduced or curtailed, each is proving to be an active and important player in the independent marketing sector. In areas ranging from real estate to wholesaling, these companies—some of whom are profiled in this article—are making common cause in many vital ways with their fellow SIGMA members.

In the November/December 2001 issue of *Independent Gasoline*

Marketing, three SIGMA members discussed the difficult decision "To Sell or Not to Sell?" They looked back on their reasons for leaving the retail side of the business and agreed that the current cycle of consolidation will likely last three to four more years, that "big box" retailers are making a significant impact, and that many independent marketers will come under increasing pressure to sell their operations.

Yet each believes their decisions also represented a natural step in the evolution of their companies. One marketer, for example, had gradually been stepping up his involvement in wholesaling for more than a decade. Another chose to concentrate on real estate, a decision influenced by tax laws as well as earlier stock considerations. Both continue to be involved in SIGMA, and both—one as a fuel supplier, the other as a landlord—continue to be vitally involved with independent marketers.

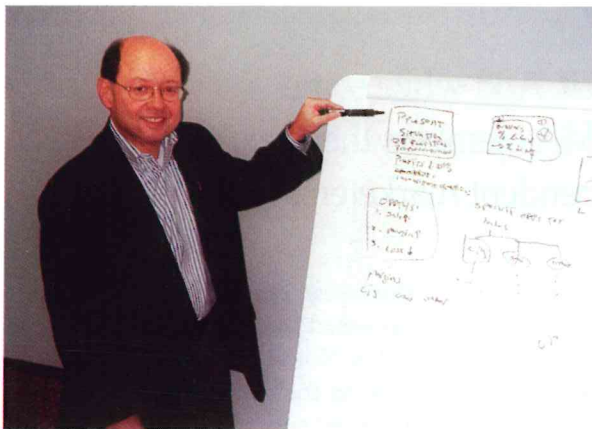
Now *Independent Gasoline Marketing* takes a look forward as three more SIGMA members discuss their involvement in petroleum marketing sans retail.

BY MARK WARD, SR.

STRIVING TO BE BEST

When one company acquires assets from another, it is common to retain the former owner as a "consultant" during the time of transition. However, it is just as common for the consultancy to exist in name only.

Yet three years ago, when Richard Salinsky decided to lease some of



Richard Salinsky enjoys his new role as a consultant.

his Best Petroleum store locations, "the new owners were amazed when, after I agreed to be a consultant, I actually took the job seriously."

In the process Salinsky learned not only that he was good at consulting but that he loved the work. After three years and numerous assignments, he believes success in consulting "is similar to peeling an

onion. I don't just look at the externals, but instead I go through the organization layer by layer."

As an example, Salinsky cites a recent consulting assignment for an independent marketer with more than 200 retail locations. "First, I got all of the information I could about the company, including complete financial information," he explains. "But rather than stop and just analyze their paperwork, I went out and talked to people. I visited a sampling of store locations—not only with a company representative, but first did some 'secret shopping' on my own."

Once Salinsky had made a thorough examination of the marketer's policies, procedures, systems, and controls, he then brought his conclusions to the company principals and senior management team. "I told them my observations," he says, "and then I helped them develop a game plan for their company."

Given the changing nature of today's industry, Salinsky suggests that independent marketers who hope to survive and prosper "need a set of fresh eyes to take an objec-

tive look at their operation and provide objective feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. I think every company should take a look at what they do, how they do it, and why they do it. To succeed today, you've got to constantly be asking yourself questions."

Salinsky believes his venture into consulting represents a natural evolution for his career. After founding Best Petroleum with a partner, he spent 15 years managing the operations side of the company and then the past 15 as sole owner. During those years he developed an industry-wide reputation as a highly innovative marketer, chronicled in a November/December 1996-cover article for *Independent Gasoline Marketing*.

"Because I was a smaller independent marketer, I know most every aspect of the business," Salinsky observes, "and unlike a major oil company, I didn't have 30 people to handle each function. I had to do it mostly myself." Though he continues today to operate a limited number of Best Petroleum locations, he believes that consulting enables him to get the most mileage from his four decades of industry experience.

Even when mergers and consolidations are not as prevalent as today, there are always people and companies who—whether by choice, circumstance, attrition, or retirement—are exiting the fuel retailing business. Many of these continue to be allies and represent a wealth of experience that, Salinsky hopes, the independent marketing community will tap into. "I'm looking forward to continuing to have a part in advancing independent marketing," he concludes, "and besides, my best friends are SIGMA members!"

Independent marketers who hope to survive and prosper "need a set of fresh eyes to take an objective look at their operation and provide objective feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. Every company should take a look at what they do, how they do it, and why they do it. To succeed today, you've got to constantly be asking yourself questions."