

Critical Marketing Issues: Follow-up

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Follow-up: Missing in Action

A famous and oft repeated statement in the realty and land development business is “location, location, location”. In the business of construction product sales its equivalent would be “follow-up, follow-up, follow-up”. In my 30 years of experience, a sales representative’s follow-up is the most important aspect of selling to design professionals. It is also, most unfortunately, missing in action. The lack of follow-up and by extension, follow through, is the one sales tool that can make or break getting and holding a specification. In the final analysis, consistent, focused follow-up is the most powerful way to minimize substitutions, develop alternates, and get product sold and installed.

Follow-up: Maintaining Relationships

Relationship is key to getting specified and limiting substitutions. While follow-up is critical to maintaining relationship there is a fine line between badgering and reasonable contact. Look for opportunities to follow-up such as new products, changes in industry standards, a new location installation that could be visited, and the like.

Follow-up: Significant Sales Opportunity

When a design professional requests product information, sends an email inquiry, calls and leaves a message, the number one priority must be to follow-up. Follow-up in this case can be as simple as answering the request or as involved as calling to schedule a call. From a certain point-of-view the speed of the follow-up can often be more important than the follow-up action itself.

Rapid, consistent follow-up develops competitive advantage and can lead to significant sales and specification opportunities. Woody Allen is quoted as saying, “80 percent of success is showing up.” Show up, follow up, and get specified.

Follow-up: Branding

An oft mentioned notion in the construction products business is that products and systems are the key elements of establishing brand with specifiers. In my opinion and experience, relationship and follow-up have the most impact on developing brand awareness with specifiers.

Tom Peters talks about “experience branding”. He maintains that your primary brand is how people experience your sales and service offerings. What better brand could you have as a company and as a sales representative than “follow-up”?

In the construction product business, consistent and useable follow-up actions are as important as any advertising, company capacities, or time in business. Follow up is experience and experience is brand.

Follow-up: Competitive Advantage

In my experience, a product representative develops competitive advantage by understanding the limitations of their products, by knowing competitive products as well as they know their own, and by demonstrating industry expertise to specifiers. Features and benefits, sole source specifications, and “my product is the center of the universe” is generally not helpful to specifiers.

Ultimately, a product representatives’ ability to be truly competitive with specifiers is to develop and deploy a consistent follow-up strategy. All the knowledge and industry expertise in the world is useless unless it is available to specifiers when they need it.

Follow-up is a tremendous competitive advantage and should be an integral and disciplined part of every construction product representative's sales and marketing toolkit. In the final analysis, follow-up is about solutions never about products. Show-up and follow-up and watch your competitive advantage grow.

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