

# STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE (FORMERLY WOODWORDS)

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## "Selling the Structural Component Industry: United We Stand, Divided We Fall" by Ken Cloyd

Got Milk? Beef—It's What's for Dinner. The Incredible Edible Egg. Pork—The Other White Meat. Behold the Power of Cheese.

What do all of these things have in common? Other than the fact that they are all foods, they are also all products that 10 or 15 years ago you wouldn't have thought needed to be advertised. But as we stand in the midst of a multi-media branding frenzy with billions of dollars being poured into the creation of identity, even products that were once considered "generic" are joining the marketing craze. Why? Because if they didn't, they wouldn't be guaranteed to make it. If they didn't tell their story, somebody else was going to tell a story of their own—in this case, that foods like beef, eggs and cheese cause heart disease and high cholesterol—stories that don't necessarily ring true over time, but left unrefuted will do damage just the same.

What does this have to do with the component industry? Not much from the perspective of consumer advertising, as we do not sell our products directly to consumers who have little interest or influence over the structural framing material that is used in a home. However, our industry has a great deal in common with these other products from the perspective that 10 or 15 years ago components didn't need to be, and therefore weren't, advertised. The reality is that even today there are manufacturers in this industry that don't see the need to market components—they've done just fine so far and assume that their success will continue. But will it? In this fast-paced culture of short attention spans and information overload, the answer all depends on who is in charge of builders' perceptions about our companies and our products.

### FROM SILENCE TO A UNIFIED VOICE

As an industry, we need to wake up and take a look at the "reality" that has been created for us while we have remained relatively silent. Marketing is about making a product more appealing and getting our customers to understand why it is they need our products. It is also about getting those that regulate our product to do so in a way that is based on facts, not myths. Once the "seed of need" is planted, demand will grow in the fertile soil of a well-tended market. When these groups understand that trusses actually save trees and are a more economically feasible building alternative, they will want to build with trusses. But if we never tell anybody, no one will ever know. Seeds can't grow if they remain in their package.

But, before we all drop what we're doing to run out and spread the word, there's an even

more important point to be made: We won't get a strong, bountiful crop unless we're all planting the same kind of seeds. This is where speaking with a unified voice comes into play.

## USING THE RIGHT TOOLS—USING THEM IN UNISON

If you've ever read more than one issue of this publication, then you know that the right tools are easy to obtain. WTCA has been providing marketing tools to its members and the industry at large for many years. These are materials that promote education, quality, safety and the economic value of building with components. Anyone who is familiar with *Framing the American Dream®*, *Engineering Components for Efficient Framing*, *Introducing the Structural Component Industry* and the variety of warning posters and tags available from WTCA knows that a unified message has been created—the seeds have been packaged and are ready for distribution.

But many still wonder where this will really get them. What are the benefits of an industry with a unified voice? Consider the following as just the beginning of where this united force could take our industry:

- Feeding the hunger for information about building with components. I have never been involved in a seminar where the attendees weren't starving to learn about trusses. Unfortunately, this isn't a topic that is covered very extensively in university programs, if at all, so the architects/engineers responsible for approving the structures that contain trusses (and the bracing required to go with them) as well as the building inspectors who are responsible for signing off on completed structures, don't necessarily know everything they need to in order to do their jobs effectively 100 percent of the time. Providing specifiers and building inspectors with the same information across the board through the use of WTCA's Truss Technology Workshops, supplemented with their printed literature, increases the comfort level of these very important players in our industry.
- Building confidence in our product. Besides using education to make architects/engineers more comfortable specifying components, the consistency of a unified industry voice also builds their confidence in the uniformity and quality of our product. A specifier that feels comfortable that members of our industry are on the same page will feel comfortable specifying our products in designs that will be used in more than one place. As our world becomes much smaller, this kind of ease with the component industry will result in trusses being built for similar projects worldwide.
- Impacting code requirements, quality standards, etc. As is the case in almost any dispute, the cause of many outweighs the complaint of one. In other words, when it comes to fighting code changes or other policy-related issues, presenting the industry as a united front with well-polished facts and information will always produce more favorable results. For example, I remember a situation in the fall of 1997 through the spring of 1998 in which the San Diego County Chapter of the Uniform Building Code was requiring engineered, wet sealed placement plans. Instead of individual manufacturers going to the county separately to complain about the requirements, about six fabricators joined forces, each bringing two or three people to the hearing (to create an even greater presence), to oppose the ruling. In addition to presenting ourselves as a united force, we used WTCA's publication, *Standard Responsibilities in the Design Process Involving Metal Plate Connected Wood*

*Trusses*, as a basis for our argument. Even though there were individual inspectors and specifiers there to rail against our industry and our position, the president of the chapter ruled in our favor because she sensed such a strong, unified feeling from the industry that was based on factual reality, not someone's misunderstanding of our industry. In addition, we had strong WTCA assistance throughout the entire process and the professional publications that were used only strengthened the sense of unity and made winning the battle possible. This is a perfect example of the kind of benefit that can be reaped from the industry standing in unison.

- Saving individual component manufacturers money. Take a close look at the time and effort that has gone into the development of WTCA's marketing and educational tools. It's easy to see that they are saving individual manufacturers thousands of dollars. For example, WTCA recently put all of its Truss Technology Workshop presentations on one CD-ROM that is available to WTCA members for \$100. Now \$100 may seem like a lot of money for one CD, but when you consider that at least \$50,000 worth of development has gone into creating these programs, the charge for the CD seems like a nominal fee to pay to be able to provide this kind of valuable education to your customers. It is important to purchase and use WTCA's marketing materials not only for the sake of speaking with one voice as an industry, but also to support the development of future marketing materials—bigger and better marketing initiatives that will continue to further the component industry
- as it stands together.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Despite everything I've presented here, there will still be many that will cling to the argument that "we never marketed the industry before and we were successful anyway." I don't deny that the industry has only grown and prospered since it got underway 48 years ago. But imagine how much better it could be if it was properly marketed? WTCA provides the tools and generates the excitement needed to do this with a united voice.

The way to obtain more market share is to educate the market and create an accurate perception about our industry and the benefits of building with components. The more the industry does in unison, the stronger the message will be. Don't sit back and assume everybody knows what he or she needs to know about the component industry. Don't take the market for granted based on past successes—even when we have been silent. The marketplace of the present—and especially that of the future—is much too noisy for silence to continue to succeed. To revise a well-known saying just a bit: "United with one voice we stand, silent and divided we fall."

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