

April 2001

"Value from Vendors" by Carl Schoening, Simpson Strong-Tie

What a great time to be in the component industry. I know what you're thinking: "Great time?" With all of the sales calls, scheduling challenges, pricing pressures, staffing issues and normal industry demands...great time? Sure.

Take a moment and think about how our industry has rebounded over the past few years. We have struggled to keep up with the rising economy but it's been much more favorable than the struggle we have had in the recession years. We now focus on improving productivity and deriving value in all facets of our plants. How, you ask, can we derive more value from our assets? Some untapped potential may be your vendors.

Most vendors think they are showing support by arriving with what appears to be a new catalog and handing out a few shirts and caps. This, however, is not the kind of support that will bring value to our supplier relationships. Quite simply, we must draw our vendors into our businesses. Forming strategic alliances with suppliers can be the easiest way to increase value in the truss plant. In today's economy suppliers must not only have a valuable product, they must fully understand our business. Vendors must be prepared to offer resources and supply services that complement the truss business. Our vendors need to look at how they support not only the individual truss manufacturer but also how they support the truss industry.

One of the primary ways that suppliers can support the truss industry is through education. This means adding value and improving the understanding of the products manufactured by our industry. Not only educating manufacturers about the vendor's products but also educating them on the use of the products supplied by the truss industry. If customers become more aware of the value of using the truss manufacturer's superior products, it will enhance the position of both the truss industry and the supplier in the marketplace.

Truss manufacturers should seek out vendors that are innovative and willing to listen to the needs of our industry. By listening, the supplier can learn the market challenges and respond. Learn what your suppliers have done for the industry and what their short-term support goals are. A significant sign of industry support is seen by their commitment to sponsoring association programs through advertising in *WOODWORDS* and exhibiting at BCMC. This will help you decide if your supplier is truly supporting your industry.

New products are another a way for your vendors to support you and add value to your business. The products they create are a tangible way for you to know that they support you and are helping you stay on the cutting edge of the industry. New products are also a way of raising the bar in a fast-moving, growth industry. We have seen substantial change in the truss industry over past few years. Vendors that have kept improving their product lines are the ones that have succeeded during this rush to technology.

Local support of your industry is another way that suppliers can bolster your business. Your vendors should be members of WTCA as well as members of your local chapter. They should offer local support of initiatives that relate to your business. Suppliers should have representatives at chapter meetings, sponsor chapter meetings and enlist other vendors to join. Chapter meetings are an opportunity for your vendors to show support by offering an educational segment prior to the meeting or by giving their insight on the truss industry.

Truss manufacturers have many suppliers. Think for a moment about those vendors who support our industry and those who do not. When was the last time your tire, office supply, lumber, staple and nail, etc. suppliers attended a chapter meeting? Or the truck dealer gave a presentation that shows how they can add value to the industry? Has the lift truck vendor listened to your challenges and offered solutions on loading and delivery? Has your temporary staffing agency taken the time to understand your business? Do your suppliers offer joint marketing or advertising to reach your customers? Do you see these vendors advertising in *WOODWORDS*? Do you see them at BCMC? These are a few ways suppliers can show support of the truss industry. There are many more.

Look at your vendors. Give them an understanding of a market they probably know little about—the truss industry. Show them how they can become valuable partners with the truss industry, earn your loyalty and have a relationship that will allow both businesses to be more profitable.

Carl Schoening recently joined Simpson Strong-Tie as National Manager, Plated Truss Products.

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