

# STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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## Marketing with WTCA Publications – Education is the Key by Libby Maurer

Marketing in your particular industry sector may present a myriad of challenges: geographic location may limit spreading ideas about a certain product, the market population may not care to be educated about your product, or perhaps you are simply having trouble breaking through in a tough market. Finding an effective way to make that crucial connection with the right people is often frustrating and intimidating. Or is it?

The component manufacturing industry includes companies of all shapes and sizes. Consequently, each company has a unique opportunity to reach certain audiences through the use of marketing strategies. In this capacity, businesses in our industry have the incredible potential to gain publicity by promoting products to different market niches. In our industry, we must recognize that education is the key to successful marketing.

Marketing through education is one of the common elements that binds the component industry and anchors our purpose. No matter the volume of sales, number of employees, or specific type of service each of us provides to our customers, we all share a very basic grassroots marketing strategy that is simply built around the concept of “getting the word out.”

Have you used the word “marketing” in a sentence lately? Three syllables, deceitfully innocent and unassuming...but if you put “marketing” to good use, it just might be the single most powerful tool your company has—besides you of course. Once you accept marketing as the best thing that ever happened to your business, it is crucial to have a vehicle to drive your campaign home. There are some valuable WTCA resources you can use to accompany you on your marketing mission. Let's take a look at what it takes to market successfully with WTCA products in our industry sector.

It isn't necessary to host a daylong media event with a parade and clowns for the kids in order to spread word about your products and services. Instead, try focusing your marketing efforts on simple yet effective strategies to gain name recognition and exposure. Here are a few practical grassroots marketing strategies that incorporate the use of WTCA publications.

### REACH OUT TO THE COMMUNITY

Great marketing opportunities lie in our communities, where the public may know little about your products and services or the importance of your business to a larger industry they might

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have knowledge of. If you can reach into your community and educate them about why your company's operations are crucial to the community, you have used a simple means of marketing your business. Why not start there?

Here's a timeless idea: educate the youth. Our young people are the most impressionable and unguarded audiences we have. Bruce Sullivan of Wood Fabricators in Troy, VA, recently gave a presentation to his son's middle school tech class about his profession as operations manager of the truss plant. He constructed a five-foot model roof truss for the ease of demonstrating the design elements of a wood truss to the class. Along those same lines, he explained the engineering component of wood truss design. In addition, he offered copies of a WTCA publication to students. "Introducing the Structural Component Industry" (SCI-D) gave students the opportunity to glance into the component manufacturing industry and ask questions as to what a profession in the industry would entail.

"[The students] were so interested in the computer capabilities of the industry. Most of them had seen roof trusses before. And they all knew about CAD programs," Sullivan said. "But they were not aware of the real life applications of powerful CAD systems. They were amazed when they learned how the roofs on many of their houses had been designed."

Sullivan also commented that the students were impressed with the machinery used inside the truss plant. "These guys had never seen a saw with two blades let alone an automated saw with six blades. They were fascinated that a computer in the design department could be giving instructions to a saw in the plant."

Who knew? Generation Y responds to many of the same phenomena of technology that we all do.

## **EXTRA! EXTRA!**

Only hear from your customers when they need something yesterday? Try sending regular product updates in the form of a periodic newsletter to customers. It is a surefire way to engage them in hot industry topics and plug your products at the same time. By taking an interest in including them in your loop of news and safety issues, they will have a favorable image of your company. An educational marketing piece such as a newsletter is an effective method to get feedback and kudos from your client base as well. You can use it to advertise and promote new products, feature hot topics in the industry, or to communicate important ideas on safety and education. As we have all seen, periodic email newsletters have proven to be very effective at getting information into the hands of readers.

Another handy use for newsletters is raising awareness about industry safety, economic trends and other issues. Timber Tech Texas, Cibolo, TX has found several WTCA publications that are useful when trying to educate their customers who may not have an outlet to industry news.

Nancy Parker, staff writer for the Thompson Agency, helps create the quarterly Timber Tech Texas newsletter. "[The newsletter] is a basic communication vehicle that features editorials on industry trends," said Parker, "but some of the most interesting parts of the newsletter are the educational inserts."

The inserts are used as tools to alert customers on industry issues they should be conscious of. The issues span from concerns about forestation, to issues surrounding steel tariffs, lumber disputes and their effect on the wood truss and component industry, to the national mold epidemic. In their most recent issue of the newsletter, Connie Nivens of Timber Tech Texas used a WTCA publication as an insert.

“We try to choose a piece of literature that focuses on a topic that our customers will appreciate,” explained Nivens. “Last issue we went with the WTCA publication on mold (TTBMold-D).”

## **A RESOURCE RIGHT AT YOUR FINGERTIPS**

BMC West Corporation is able to tell their marketing success story with the help of WTCA publications. Mark Bittner of BMC West in Frisco, TX, recently had the WTCA publication, Framing the American Dream® (FAD-D), customized with the BMC West logo and contact information. Bittner uses the document as a marketing piece for the wood truss industry when speaking with prospective clients. “When we are pursuing different customers, we hand [Framing the American Dream®] out and ask them to consider building with trusses.”

What will be surprising to many in our industry, he explained, is the difficulty in convincing potential customers to consider trussing instead of stick framing. “We have an obstacle in the market down here. Trying to convert these people who have been stick framing for years is tough,” he said. “They are just not educated on the advantages and savings that building with trusses brings.”

Bittner tells the story of the marketing model introduced above: BMC West uses WTCA's publications to generate new business and facilitate education of their industry. The relationship proves mutually beneficial, as Bittner is able to promote both his company and the industry in one sensible move. Rocket science? No, just good marketing.

## **GO TEAM!**

Joining forces with fellow businesses in your market by using WTCA Chapters also defines a key function of this marketing model. Consider the same situation where one company integrates WTCA publications into their marketing scheme, but now add a twist: two competitors working together through their local WTCA Chapter to promote a common message that will benefit the industry as a whole.

Stan Sias, former Engineered Wood Products Manager at LaValley Building Supply and WTCA-Northeast Chapter President explained that his focus on marketing helps not only his business, but also serves as a voice of goodwill for the entire component manufacturing industry. It is another approach to marketing that operates through the dissemination of knowledge. Sias said that the marketing efforts of LaValley Building Supply always turn back to education. One way to achieve this is by recognizing that opportunities to educate diverse markets exist everywhere. Sias finds that tradeshow present a wealth of educational opportunities for combining efforts

with competitors in the Northeast Chapter to raise important industry messages.

“When competitors can stand at the same podium and relay the same message, it is really valuable to our industry,” Sias commented, “there’s something to be said for industry cooperative effort.”

## JOIN THE CROWD

Still not sure how to jump on the marketing bandwagon? Most likely, you are struggling with one of two thought patterns: “every brilliant and effective marketing idea has already been used by our competitors” or “our budget won't allow for an intricate marketing campaign.” If you are struggling with the first one, perhaps it is time to take a giant step outside of your business and try to gain the perspective of clients. What would attract them the most to your company? Would they recognize your company's name from a community bulletin or a radio advertisement? How would they rate your level of customer service? These are all parts of a solid marketing strategy that you could start with.

If it is a tight budget that you are stuck on, evaluate some low cost marketing alternatives or brainstorm free options available to your business. Let's see...love, belly-button lint and word of mouth all come without a cost, but just think: the most business-friendly of these has the potential to reach the largest audience in the shortest span of time. After all, word of mouth is free. Isn't it worth it to make sure what people are saying about your company is positive?

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