

# STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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## WTCA Update

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### Marketing Is More Than Just Products by Carl Schoening, WTCA Membership Committee Chair

*"Potential customers...liked that everyone in the plant knew the customer by job because somewhere inside of all human beings, we like people to know who we are."*

Everyone is always looking for new, innovative ways to market products and services. In the component industry, we have always tried to show customers that we have better service and higher quality products. Well, there is more. At one point in my career, I managed a plant in an area that was serviced by six component manufacturers all within a 122 mile radius. Of those six, not one could be called a poor supplier of products or services. Sure, all six of us did things a little differently, but we all used quality materials, produced quality components and provided good service. We all had loyal customers, which meant the market was divided and growing market share was challenging to say the least. There was a point at which we had to ask ourselves: How can we market effectively when every competitor is on the same level?

#### A NEW TWIST ON AN OLD THEME

So, I went about it a little differently: I marketed my employees. I created value in unlikely places. I invited customers and potential customers to my plant as often as possible. I tried to make sure that the visitors were comprised of current customers and a potential customer as well. Sometimes it was during the work day. By having visitors during the work day they could see how we built trusses and were encouraged to talk to the guys on the line, the crew leaders, the foreman and the production manager. Customers were always surprised when they were introduced and the guys on the line knew the customer by the jobs they had built. They would chat about particularly difficult jobs or how they enjoyed building an unusually easy job. This always had an impact on the supplier-customer relationship.

Potential customers found this very amusing. They liked that everyone in the plant knew the customer by job because somewhere inside of all human beings, we like people to know who we are. This opened the door for discussion about what we could do for the potential customer. Even if the guys on the line and the stackers knew the customer and understood the value, potential customers began to feel there was a higher level of focus on quality work. Everyone in the plant wanted the customer to be satisfied. Our employees knew they would see the customer and wanted to be proud of the job they did. In this small way we were able to build market share.

I would also invite customers and potential customers to our monthly barbeque. Myself, the production manager and the rest of the inside staff would cook for the production guys. This did a couple of things. First it built morale and camaraderie between the inside guys and the outside guys. There is generally a lack of appreciation between these groups at most manufacturing operations. This helped improve that. Secondly, invited guests got to see that we had a strong, stable, friendly work environment. That type of environment has a way of improving quality. Everyone works together to solve problems and provide the best experience for the customer. The conversations that occurred during those visits did more to build customer confidence than anything else. Potential customers really got to see and talk to the entire staff in a setting different than they had a chance to do anywhere else. These small things separated us from our tough and competitive marketplace.

## **"DELIVERING" A MARKETING STRATEGY**

One of the surprising things that I learned and capitalized on was how important a good, friendly, service-focused truck driver can be. I started marketing my "Best Truck Driver in the Industry" idea when several customers started telling me how great Richard (my lead driver) was. Pretty soon we were developing relationships throughout our market area. Everyone in the yard had business cards, without exception. That meant the stackers, table guys, crew leaders... everyone. That made a difference in morale and sales. Every time the drivers delivered to a job that was adjacent to one we didn't provide products for, they would go next door and introduce themselves to the framers. They would chat about how we customized deliveries. We tried to drop the trusses exactly where they needed to be. If delivering after hours, we would call the framer and ask where to drop the trusses. The framer wasn't the guy buying the trusses most of the time, but could influence the buying decision. Our drivers (coached by Richard) became friends with many framers, not just those working for existing customers. They took the time to ask about problems and how the job could be done better. Everyone has an opinion and they like to be asked what it is. It wasn't long before we were regarded as the company with the best drivers in the area.

This really helped boost sales. Framers applied buying pressure and we delivered on the expectation. Those barbeques turned into bigger and bigger gatherings as time went on. The drivers were increasing sales by being friendly and by instilling confidence. The yard guys respected the effort and worked hard to reward the effort by producing the highest quality product. The sales guys' job became easier as well. Everyone smiled. My crazy idea of marketing people, not just our product, worked. Life was good.

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## **TPI Board Approves Single Set of Bracing Documents**

If you use WTCA or TPI publications, read this to find out about the new changes to come within the next few months!

The TPI Board of Directors and WTCA's Executive Committee met in San Diego on May 6, 2003, and made crucial progress in the effort to implement the WTCA/TPI litmus test in the work of

the two associations where it is possible. Thanks to the litmus test, some exciting changes are on the horizon for the structural building components industry.

The group had a discussion on the litmus test as agreed to at the April 2002 joint WTCA/TPI meeting. Following this discussion, the TPI Board agreed to the following definition of the litmus test:

*TPI's role is to deal with truss plate design, manufacturing and safety; individual truss design and engineering; consensus standards for individual truss design and engineering; building code regulations as they pertain to individual truss design and engineering; and machinery. Specifically, TPI produces truss design documents. Using this concept as the framework from which they defined their role, TPI's scope of work then includes all the design methods and references made on the truss design documents, the consensus standards development process, publication of ANSI consensus design standards as they relate to metal plate connected wood truss design, all building code regulations that impact truss design and software development and third party quality control. For any projects that fall inside these parameters, TPI will be the lead organization. WTCA will take the lead in all other areas as they relate to component manufacturing, the use of trusses by component manufacturer customers and aggressive fulfillment of its mission statement.*

The discussion then turned to where the implementation of this litmus test, as it pertains to the two associations' work on bracing, will be applied next. A review of the March 25, 2003 teleconference minutes resulted in the unanimous passage of the following motions.

#### **MOTION 1: ONE SET OF DOCUMENTS**

It was decided that our industry is best served if there is a single set of documents that serves as the fundamental information base when dealing with the proper specification, storing, loading, handling, installing and bracing of metal plate connected wood trusses. The desire is to have common publications available to the industry, to replace the various publications with different appearances or wording serving the same objectives.

#### **MOTION 2: NEW OR UPDATED PARENT DOCUMENT**

The HIB-91 booklet is now referenced on truss design drawings. This makes it essential that a new or updated parent document be created. The desire by the WTCA and TPI boards is to have one document to reference on truss design drawings rather than all the separate TTB information that has been produced. This updated parent document will be a compilation of the existing HIB-91 and TTBs. The new parent document will be reviewed by TPI TAC, WTCA's Marketing and Engineering & Technology Committees and then approved by WTCA and TPI Boards. This parent document will be referenced on all truss design drawings, and is intended as a bridge document until an ANSI consensus-developed publication is completed.

There was then a discussion on the white paper and its status, a review of the publications that WTCA makes available to its membership and a review of the very preliminary draft of the proposed parent document.

There was a strong desire by the WTCA group to get something in place to reference on the truss design drawings as expeditiously as possible. The group discussed and established a timeline for this work. The ultimate goal of publishing this single set of documents was set for October 1, 2003 and to be unveiled to the public at BCMC 2003, in Phoenix on October 8-10.

Issues regarding the splitting of revenue from a single set of documents were discussed. A TPI/WTCA sub-committee will make recommendations to the TPI Board and WTCA Executive Committee on what will be in the best interest of both associations.

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