The Marketing Field Force

Many Wall and Ceiling Contractors Overlook or Discount Their Impact But a Field Force Can Have Significant Impact on Business Success

Can a sub contractor’s field forces affect how much work the sub may get in the coming year? The tremendously positive or negative impact of a sub’s field forces on potential clients-work is almost universally underrated. Furthermore, utilizing field forces as a “marketing tool” is many times overlooked by generals or subs who are sensitive to the necessity for a strong and continuing marketing effort.

Construction executives are frequently insensitive to the fact that their field forces can affect their marketing or future business activities dramatically. The actual men and supervisors doing the construction work can serve as a powerful force in generating new business. Or, they can be such a turn-off to the building client that he will not even consider the sub for repeat work. Whether the executive likes it or not, his construction field forces, supervisors and project managers are his silent marketing partners.

The firm has worked with in-house marketing departments and has served as the marketing, general management and public relations consultants for a wide variety of general and sub contracting firms throughout the United States and internationally. In addition, JRK, Inc. has assisted many generals and subs in forming their own marketing divisions.

Through my 20 years of construction experiences, I have found that the Director of Construction or. Senior Vice President in charge of field construction is often one of the most sensitive to the necessity for marketing. This occurs because the man in charge of field construction knows only new work can keep the men in the field busy, productive and employed. Therefore, he sets a very high priority on getting new work.

Unfortunately, however, many times this person becomes embroiled in a one man crusade for better, or even adequate, field marketing. Even if other members of the management team believe his sincerity, they will often not authorize the time and money necessary to cultivate the marketing potential of their field forces, because these expenditures seem . . . on the surface . . . to be hard to justify or measure results on.

If building executives knew they would probably increase their total annual work by 7% to 12% or more by sensitizing their field forces to the importance of their impact on marketing, I’m sure their attitude toward field marketing would change dramatically. While it doesn’t take a large expenditure of hard dollars to upgrade the field marketing effort, it does take time and effort to create the proper level of awareness and alertness to new business opportunities . . . among a group of people who are normally not keyed into this kind of thinking.

In an effort to help construction executives better understand how a continuing field marketing philosophy can ultimately pay big dividends for the company, here are six sensitivities that must be instituted for the field plan to work successfully. These sensitivities are, in reality, steps and plans of action that must involve everyone . . . from the laborer in the field to the sub contractor himself . . . in order to work. In fact, if senior management dismisses or downplays the importance of these steps, then the entire plan is doomed to failure and any effort will, in the final analysis, be a wasted one.

In short, if it is important to the boss, it’s important to the staff workers. If the senior management team believes a field marketing strategy is something you work at for three, five or six months and then forget
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about, save yourself the time, effort and money . . . and forget about it now!

1) DON’T NEGLECT GOOD BUILDING SIGNS!

Too many contractors neglect to erect attractive, eye-catching building signs. Make sure a building sign is on every job you’re doing. In cases where interior construction work is being performed, ask the owner if it would be possible to put your sign up on the outside (in front) of the building.

Unfortunately, building signs have a tendency to walk off a job site. If the sign is stolen, have it replaced as quickly as possible. A sub can save money on signs by having 25 made at once, using a silk screen manufacturing process. This procedure provides the best results at the lowest cost and at the highest aesthetic-graphics value. Use wood or metal for the signs, never cardboard or paper.

If there is a “gang” sign displayed (a single sign giving credit to all building team members) on a public works job, for example, make sure your firm’s name is listed on the sign, if at all possible. If you’re a general contractor, you should have no difficulty getting your name on the sign. However, if you’re a sub contractor, you may experience some problems participating in a “gang” sign.

2) EDUCATE YOUR FIELD FORCES!

No one is going to turn a construction job site into a gentile English Tea room. However, make it clear to your tradesmen working on the job . . . whether they are on your direct payroll as a member of staff or hired from the local union hall . . . that you expect them to behave with civility during working hours.

“Civility” is defined to mean that drugs, alcohol, excessive use of obscene language in public places, carelessness with tools or discourtesy to the owner’s reps (who may periodically tour the site) will not be tolerated. Make it crystal clear that you are not trying to turn them into angels, only trying to guarantee them they will have employment next month!

All too often I have walked onto construction job sites with owner’s representatives (or the owner!) and found workers with a belly full of beer after lunch time, carelessly handling tools, publicly shouting obscenities at their supervisors, and responding to an owner’s representative’s simple suggestions-like the rep was some form of babbling idiot from another planet!

You can just imagine how long it’s going to take the owner to realize that project management just doesn’t exist on the job site. Then, contractors and subs wonder why they don’t get repeat work, even when their prices are competitive!

3) ALERT YOUR VP OF CONSTRUCTION AND PROJECT MANAGERS . . . to the unique marketing opportunities available to them. Encourage these people to develop strong personal relations with the building owner’s representatives and to report back to the office as quickly as possible any word about another new job the owner may be planning.

The Vice President of Construction and the Project Managers should also be encouraged to take the owner’s
representatives to lunch, in an effort to get to know and understand them as human beings. If these personal relationships can be built and maintained over a period of time, you will be amazed at how much early potential new work information can be obtained in this manner.

4) VISUAL GRAPHICS
THAT SELL!
Trucks, hard hat decals, stationery, letters of transmittal, etc. have a tremendous impact, both individually and collectively, on your marketing effectiveness. They are your most visible ambassadors to other people’s eyes and minds as they travel through the mails, over the roads and on the job sites.

If your trucks are filthy; your logo (office symbol) graphically unattractive; general information disorganized, missing, sloppy, etc., then the people seeing and receiving these things render negative, ‘instant judgements (whether you realize it or not)’ about your company. Because, if all these negative things represent your firm, then you must be all these things as well!

5) EDUCATE YOUR OWN SUBS
If you’ve subbed any work, make it clear to your subs that you expect them to perform like an organized business . . . not candy store operators!

A sub subcontractor should also be expected to be on time for job meetings with owners reps; keep a clean job site; be prepared with answers to owners questions-problems; have properly prepared shop drawings (where required) and should, at the very least, be dressed neatly and cleanly. Above all else, you should impress upon them the fact that lying to the owners and making promises they can’t keep will not be tolerated.

It’s better to tell an owner “I don’t know, but I will check out the problem and get back to you,” than to promise completion dates, delivery dates, etc. based on some pie-in-the-sky notions or sheer guesses. And, if you become a sub subcontractor, do all these things without being asked or prodded. You’ll find you’ll get more work and (sadly) half the time he won’t even know why . . . but if you pin him down he’ll cite some of these things we’ve talked about.

6) PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER
How do you get all these points across to the many people involved in a construction project?

Many general contracting firms hold monthly meetings with their supervisory people and other firms even conduct in-house seminars and staff meetings for these purposes alone.

These gatherings are truly time well invested and I would strongly suggest that a program of these seminars/meetings be established on an annual basis. The meetings are also an excellent forum from which to extract information from the field people about problems they feel need the attention of senior management.