



Sid Bourne on facing up to rogue customers

Floorlayer gives client **one in the eye!**

I RECENTLY attended a two-day event at the distributor Florco Thatcham, where customers were invited to meet flooring suppliers and see product demonstrations.

It all went really well. The show was professionally organised with many contractors attending. I got talking to quite a few of them. As usual, there was no shortage of complaints along with some really funny stories about their experiences on site.

At the risk of disappointing you, I am keeping most of these stories to myself. They are being added to my collection of anecdotes because one day, when I get around to doing it, I intend to write a book. But there is one little story I'll tell below which will leave some of you with raised eyebrows.

Talking about the Florco distributor event for a moment longer, there should be more shows like this across the industry. It's amazing what you hear when you meet the people on the ground (or on the floor, if you prefer).

Way back in the good old days this type of open day was very popular. You went along and you could always put a face to a name, but that seems to have been lost now. I presume the reason is down to cost. Nowadays you are mostly left talking to someone down a phone line. It's a bit impersonal, if you know what I mean.

A lot of installers I know will agree with me on this point. Sometimes when you meet someone face-to-face they start boasting about everything they have done; and they tell you that there's nothing they can't do.

But when you look them in the eye, you can tell within a few minutes if they really know what they are talking about. That can be difficult over the phone.

There were one or two contractors boasting at the Florco show, but mainly installers were talking about consumers making bogus complaints. Generally, I do believe these stories because I now come across rogue customers on a regular basis.

Like the cowboy fitters in our

Rogue customer to flooring contractor:
Before the job: 'The old laminate floor was very bouncy anyway and it did not bother us.'

Just put down the old floor. It won't be a problem as we are selling the house'

After the job: 'I know what I said, but I have since decided that I am not happy! ... I want my money back!'

trade who destroy consumers' trust in the rest of us, who are honest. So there are rogue customers (which you sometimes can't differentiate from the honest ones) who make retailers and contractors worry about whether they will get paid or not. I do not apologise for saying this because it is true.

Here's one of the stories I was told about rogue customers.

A certain contractor was about to install an engineered floor onto a concrete slab (which was not too clever, but that's another story).

This was an insurance job, so he informed the customer – who was acting like the 'lady of the house' – that the subfloor would have to be made flat to industry standards.

'Don't worry,' she told the contractor. 'The old laminate floor was very bouncy anyway and it did not bother us. Just put down the old floor. It won't be a problem as we are selling the house.'

So the floor goes down involving two days work. Finally the contractor finishes and then asks the insurance company for his money.

'We can't pay you. The customer has complained about the bounce in flooring!' It won't surprise you that the contractor's jaw dropped.

'Just a minute,' he said. 'She told me that the bounce was not a problem. She just wanted the floor down so she could sell the house.'

'Hard luck,' replied the insurance company.

So the contractor goes back to site to face 'the lady of the

house'. As if butter would not melt, she tells him: 'I know what I said, but I have since decided that I am not happy!'

It was at that point that the contractor realised that he had been taken in by 'the lady of the house'.

He knew that technically he was wrong, so he agreed to take up the flooring and make good the subfloor. He explained to her that, although he would not charge for labour, because it was his mistake, he would obviously have to charge for the material.

'No way!' she says and closes the door on him. So the contractor had to go back to the insurance company. There was no joy there either. 'We don't pay for things like that,' the contractor was told.

Not feeling very happy, the contractor realises that he will have to take a hit and returns to do the work. But that wasn't the end of the story.

On ringing the doorbell he is confronted by 'the lady' who says: 'I don't want you to do anything with the floor. But I want money back!'

'I can't do that because this is an insurance job,' replied the contractor.

But she is determined to drive home her advantage.

'Okay,' she says, 'how much would it have cost me if you were quoting me to have done subfloor preparation in the first place?'

In response to the contractor's quote, she says: 'Add another £50 onto your price and I will live with it!'

Yet again, the contractor returns to the insurance company to tell them of the conversation. No sign of help at all. By now the

contractor is at the end of his tether and has decided that enough is enough.

What he did next will not be to the approval of some of you, but he felt that someone has to teach these rogue customers a lesson.

So this contractor went back to the 'lady of the house' and told her he would take up the floor, replace it with a new one, and then talk money. Presumably thinking that she still held the whip hand, she agreed.

So he duly uplifted the whole floor. Then he took everything away, including the scotia and brad nails, and put it all in his van.

'I am going now,' he told her. 'I will inform the insurance company of my actions and you can get some other mug to do the work!' Upon which he left the premises.

He informed the insurance company which was not too pleased. They then phoned the police. The constable who visited the contractor – on hearing his story – decided that this was not a police matter. It would be up to the customer to take legal action.

Needless to say, she didn't and the contractor has since heard nothing more.

I presume that the insurance company did find a mug to do the work and that this rogue customer got her free floor in the end.

I will continue this theme in few more future columns as it is absolutely amazing the things that Mr & Mrs Rogue get away with.

There is actually a new website in which trades people can name and shame rogue consumers. Flooring contractors should perhaps check if any of their customers are on this site.

www.roguecustomer.com

In conclusion, I would also just like to pass on my personal thanks to everyone at Florco Thatcham who did a great job at their open day. Let's hope there are more to come. **CFJ**

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