



Martin Cummins on the value of keeping records

What I am telling you here is on the record!

I HAVE been involved recently with a couple of complaints which contrasted markedly, not so much in what needed doing, but more in what had been done or what was known to have been done.

The first one was three or four years since the installation and we had no record of having provided any advice or recommendations specific for the installation – the building owner had no record of what was used either.

Our current involvement was as a consequence of the contractor being called in to put the job right. He wanted to use Laybond materials and obviously we wanted to see what the problem was.

We suspected that the original specification was bad, but there were no records with details of who had done the installation, what products had been used or any information about what they had found during the installation.

The second complaint was in complete contrast. The company had thorough records of the entire installation. He was only a small contractor, and incidentally not a member of the CFA, but he had a log book with details on what he had done and what products he had used. He even listed site conditions on one particular day,

noting there was no heating on.

Investigating a problem starts with what has been done and the second contractor, though very much smaller than the first more ‘prestigious’ contractor, was able to provide this and so much more.

Also, the second contractor had established a chain of responsibility, and I don’t mean an excuse, but a real tangible record of the project. Not needed in this case, but good records can be used to defend an installation and provide proof that it was done correctly.

At least it helps identify where the problem may be through process of elimination. As a manufacturer, we have confidence in our products and if the right products are used problems are most likely down to something else, usually bad conditions or inappropriate recommendations.

With no records it is easy to question if the right products were used and this may suggest to the client that corners have been cut.

Returning to the first installation – the site with no records – the situation would have definitely called for a primer (trust me on this one!!) yet there was no evidence of one being used.

Eventually we managed to contact the company who initially

installed the flooring and with the contractor who maintained that they always primed. Did he have any knowledge of the works carried out on this site? Vaguely he recalled it... commenting that it was definitely one of their projects as they did all the work for this client!

If a record had been made on the day, maybe even including the brand name and batch numbers of the products used (including the floorcoverings, if relevant) they could have justified to the main contractor that they had done all the right processes and not had to worry about any claims or loss of face.

It makes you ponder the reasons why they didn’t get the re-fit! They could also have gone to the manufacturer (fortunately not us) and tell them that all the right products have been used.

When you do jobs or have jobs done around the home or purchase something, you record what you did or what you bought, if only through the receipt you keep as guarantee. I still have quotes for the installation of my central heating system from 12 years ago, the boiler type, service agreement etc., all neatly filed away.

I also have the proof of payment and guarantee certificate, and yes I

have had to call the installers back for a leak and guess what... they had records too!

So why do so few in the flooring business do this? Why don’t you know what products were used on a particular installation? Should something go wrong three years down the road, you can call on these records and know immediately what was done.

I recommend that all flooring contractors keep records and not stop with date, time, product and batch number. Add information about site conditions – was it heated, was it damp, had you been instructed specifically to proceed with an installation having raised concerns?

Surely a daily log of this sort can easily be created. Good record keeping should be an integral part of the flooring installation process, which ultimately becomes an endorsement of the quality of the installation by you!

Stand out above the rest by doing something more; helping you, helping the client and helping us when things go wrong. **CFJ**

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Leo Aspden on marketing in a weak economy

Marketing your way out of the recession

A RECENT article from B2B Marketing Online suggested that over 90% of UK finance directors in the B2B sector support the idea that companies should ‘market’ their way out of the recession.

The research surveyed 1000 UK directors. More than four out of five favoured the idea of further investment in marketing and customer analysis as a way of countering the downturn.

The survey which covered firms of different sizes, in various key industry sectors across the UK also showed that 84% of respondents believed that strengthening marketing investment and customer insight were important in current circumstances.

Marketing is for life, not for Christmas: Along with two of my fellow chartered marketers I was recently invited, on behalf of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, to participate in a national workshop

programme currently being offered by Lloyds TSB to provide expert support for SME businesses.

Four key areas were identified; business planning, managing your finances, retaining and finding new customers, and working with local business support organisations.

Here again, the chief economist of Lloyds TSB was endorsing the same message, it is key that businesses continue to invest in their marketing.

Don’t become invisible: This is the time to understand what your business brings to the market. Ensure you have clearly identified key areas of differentiation.

Absolutely essential during this period, perhaps more than ever, is the need to communicate with our customers, on a level that is both relevant and appropriate to their needs. This is the time to undertake a strategic review. Review core target markets and customers, do

we know who our key customers are, do we understand them, what drives them and their needs?

Review core products and services, are they still relevant, is it time for NPD, do we need to fit or adapt to any shift which has occurred as a result of the economic recession?

Continue to review media and marketing communications. Are they still appropriate and cost effective? Are our current methods achieving our company objectives? Can we make more effective use of e-marketing?

Quality not quantity: Businesses should focus on quality leads not quantity. Now is the need to cut out the clutter and take time to qualify the leads our sales and marketing activity generates so that our teams can be more effective all round.

The term ‘inside sales’ has been used to differentiate from telesales

or telemarketing.

Where as telemarketing is often focused on prospect discovery with high volume and generally low quality leads, ‘inside sales’ applies the process of prospect qualification and prospect management to develop lower volumes of higher quality leads.

In certain cases, those implementing the concept of ‘inside sales’ have seen as much as a 25% increase in the number of marketing generated leads that convert to qualified opportunities. Clearly, to coin a phrase, this year is certainly not, ‘business as usual’. **CFJ**

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