



**Consultant Terry Wolfe on the failure of asphalt under sold wood**

# Distributors clearly have a valuable role

REGULAR readers of **CFJ** may recall that I have visited various manufacturers of flooring materials, moisture meters and subfloor materials to learn about their products and their views on our wonderful flooring industry.

However, there is one part of the industry I have previously omitted: distribution. So this month I report on a visit to STS Flooring Distributors in Orpington when I spoke to Ray Colgate, md and Brian Walters, sales director.

I remember dealing with Stair tread Supply Company for stair nosings before STS proper came into being. I visited their Penge depot in the 1980's, when the flooring company for which I worked was considering becoming an Armstrong Floor Fashion Centre and STS was a FFC distributor.

Their takeover of Flooring Distributors of Croydon marked the start of the company as we know it today, now with depots in Orpington, Croydon, Watford,

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Cambridge and Reading.

I first asked Ray and Brian what distributors contributed to the industry since many materials are available directly from manufacturers.

The chief advantage, according to Brian, is being a 'one-stop shop'. A flooring contractor doesn't have to buy a dpm, screeding compound, ply, nails, adhesive and floor covering from six different manufacturers; he can buy it all from a distributor and have it delivered directly to site next day!

The contractor is also saved the bother of opening six different accounts for payment. Distributors mean the contractor doesn't need to hold stock or have his own warehouse.

Of course, a large distributor

like STS (which holds over £4m of stock) keeps many other items flooring contractors might need, from stapling machines and staples to moisture meters. Next day delivery is a big advantage, but requires an enormous investment in transport by the distributor (STS have 20 lorries).

One of the biggest problems for today's distributors is competition on price from rivals. Obviously, to maintain a large warehouse filled with hundreds of flooring products and accessories takes an enormous investment, and distributors must retain a reasonable percentage of the purchase price to finance this investment.

Ray and Brian made it clear that, whilst distributors do not have the expertise to adjudicate

in the case of a dispute about material quality, they are a valuable link between manufacturer and contractor. They provide an important liaison which serves to avoid direct confrontation and helps to achieve an amicable resolution.

When I originally decided to visit a distributor, I thought of asking whether they really contribute anything useful to our industry and whether we would all be better off dealing directly with manufacturers.

The answer is encapsulated in the job I organised many years ago from my office in Highgate with the site in Southampton. I spent most of a day on the phone to suppliers of linoleum, adhesive, ply, nails, screeding compound, weld rods, etc. Today, one call to a local distributor suffices. **CFJ**

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**Harvey Booth on responding to business opportunities**

# Why good specification is important

IN today's tough times, it's easy to consider cutbacks. But, in our industry, cutting back can mean cutting corners – and ultimately, compromising on quality. This route should be avoided at all costs.

Reputation is king and now, more than ever, it's vital that companies, from manufacturer to floorlayer, give the best possible service. This means using the right product, tools, and accessories that are fit for purpose, at all times.

A quality service should always start with a professional sales procedure; standards shouldn't be lowered to reach price objectives. Always offer the full package and don't skimp on a specification in order to keep prices low.

A good sales process isn't just about shifting a floor. It should examine suitability of product and include advice on subfloor preparation and using proper underlay, with sound or damp

**'Trying to cut corners is false economy'**

proof properties, if necessary. Always recommend correct accessories, along with suitable ongoing maintenance products.

Many consumers don't know that finishing details, like door bars, stair nosings, skirtings or even furniture feet exist.

They're not aware that an underlay which absorbs footfall noise should always be used in installations above ground level, or that wood floors laid over a concrete subfloor should always be treated with an appropriate damp proof membrane.

A good initial 'sale' can make an incredible difference to an installation, to customer satisfaction and to other people's perception of the finished floor.

Future recommendation is so powerful and it's vital that sales teams bear this in mind when dealing with customers.

More and more instances crop up where floors fail because of improper specifications. In hard times, packing foam is sometimes used as an underlay but because it doesn't have the correct lifecycle, density or resilience, it quickly squashes and loses all effectiveness.

Damp proof membranes are often omitted from specifications; subfloors that aren't levelled adequately get the 'double packing foam' treatment. These short-cuts, and others, store up big future problems and will impact on customer satisfaction and potential for future recommendation.

Even when a floor is correctly laid, companies often fail to recommend correct maintenance products. Poor quality treatments can dull surfaces and, in the worse cases, cause lacquer to flake and oiled floors to become

blemished.

Tempting as it is to try to reduce cost to the customer, it's never worth it in the long run. Manufacturers test products extensively to ensure there are no long term problems; follow their recommendations to the letter.

By giving an honest specification, in terms of finished look and ongoing maintenance, you'll be offering the best possible service. You'll also avoid issues regarding invalidation of warranty and, should there be a service issue, you'll only have to deal with one manufacturer.

It's false economy to try and save pence on inferior products. Quality always wins through and good reputations are built from a sales foundation up. **CFJ**

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