

SILENCE OF THE CARPET FIRMS!

THE proverbial man from Mars picking up any copy of **CFJ** might assume that vinyl holds the lion's share of the UK flooring market. This issue contains our annual vinyl feature, but there isn't a month when vinyl does not enjoy a significant amount of exposure in this magazine.

Indeed, our Martian reader may be surprised to learn that carpets dominate the UK flooring market, holding a massive 51% (£539m) of the contract sector. Vinyl is way behind in value terms, having a mere 15% (£157m) of the market, just ahead of wood, according to the latest AMA Research survey. So why do textile floor coverings get relatively less coverage?

While we do try to keep a balance, the number of 'column inches' each product receives is in the suppliers' own hands. With a few exceptions, most UK carpet manufacturers seldom submit information on prestigious projects or new products. It's their choice to maintain a low profile, but that makes them partly to blame for the ascendancy of smooth floor coverings.

And when they do occasionally speak up, it is usually to complain about the rapidly increasing influx into the UK of 'cheap' imported carpets (See survey on page 28).

The Carpet Foundation, established as a marketing body for the textile floor coverings industry and backed by 11 leading British carpet manufacturers, has intentionally steered clear of the contract sector. It has always preferred to focus on the residential market via retailers, perhaps forgetting that many high street outlets also undertake a considerable volume of 'soft' contract work as a supplement to their revenue.

Indeed, most carpet promotion in **CFJ** is supplied to us by

overseas manufacturers, rather than the Carpet Foundation or its members. This is a sad reflection on the British industry and is especially regrettable because carpets have such a fascinating story to tell, while also offering many benefits.

In contrast, virtually every major vinyl supplier is vigorously proactive about promoting the perks of their products in trade journals like **CFJ**. Vinyl flooring is forecast to achieve steady growth in future years, grabbing more and more market share from carpets! This is doubtless due, in large measure, to the prominent stance of the manufacturers and suppliers.

Amid the crashing stock markets, there is a serious lesson here for every business. It is natural in a recession to rein in spending, but those companies which simply slash marketing and advertising budgets are foolishly short-sighted.

Research has shown that firms which continue to advertise during a downturn, while their competitors are cutting back, can greatly increase their market share. The clear message is that if you regard marketing as an investment, rather than an optional expense, you will reinforce your customer loyalty and prosper when the economy improves, as it surely will.



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For starters

A floorcoverings distributor reports receiving a phone call from a certain flooring contractor enquiring about two rolls he had ordered: 'I need the material on site urgently! When

will you have it delivered to me?' 'We will send it as soon as you have paid for your last order we delivered six months ago!' 'But that will be too late,' came the reply.

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