

Contractor Marketing


Commercial Sales

LinkedIn, Twitter, & Google+ are Making a Difference

by Heidi J. Ellsworth, executive vice president of marketing, EagleView Technology Corp.

(Editor's Note: Heidi J. Ellsworth, a graduate of University of Portland, has been working in the roofing industry since 1993. Having held positions with Malarkey Roofing, Carlisle SynTec and EcoStar LLC, Ellsworth is best known as the founder of the roofing-focused marketing firm, HJE Marketing. She is now executive vice president of marketing for EagleView Technology Corporation.)



 Commercial roofing sales have always been about relationships. For commercial roofing companies focused on long-term, negotiated private work, the relationships and friendships with building owners and property management professionals define their business. For bidding public work, it is critical to understand the entities involved and especially key decision makers. In the past that has always been determined by who you know and the number of local networking events the company sales force could attend. As times have changed due to technology, the recession, and overall competition, commercial contractors are traveling further while focusing on diversifying their businesses. The need for social media exposure for 21st century networking is obvious.

Commercial roofing contractors are working with building owners, facility managers, and property and maintenance directors, to name a few. The networking, marketing, and sales processes are different than they are for residentially focused roofing com-

panies. Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest may be stronger residential plays; whereas LinkedIn is definitely business to business (B2B) focused. Additionally, there are social media outlets that can cross both markets such as Twitter and Google+.

This column focuses on the B2B aspect of gaining commercial roofing customers by leveraging social media. Since getting in front of property management professionals usually involves enterprise sales tactics, including high levels of networking and research, let's start with one of the best social media tools for this type of marketing: LinkedIn.

Contractors are using LinkedIn every day. One of the greatest assets for LinkedIn is the networking. The ability to look up companies and determine company positions, titles, and reporting structure, allows sales people to use their time effectively in positioning meetings and relationship building with the right decision makers.

In order to optimize this tool for sales representatives, contractors should take the time to develop a strong company page on LinkedIn. This page tells the story of what the company can offer and what differentiates the company. More importantly, it should entice the prospective customer to take action. Some of these actions include following the company, viewing blog posts, visiting the company website, or sending a message for more information. All of these can create the opportunity for the company to promote its value proposition but also create ongoing content that establishes the company and employees as industry experts. Use it as a tool to promote trust and interest with consistent, relative information.

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One of the best ways to determine the content for the page and ongoing updates is to look at what contractors are doing across the country. By following leading companies it is easy to begin selecting content and gathering ideas for what is important to your brand. This is not about copying but about seeing the bigger picture and determining what works. Take the time to look at companies from all parts of the country and see what they are posting, who is following them and review their overall page content. The results will be interesting in that many contractors do not have a page while others have a page with minimal content. Unfortunately, a large number of contractors do not post updates at all thus losing a key advantage. Those who stay current already have a serious advantage over their competition.

The question may be, “what do I post and why would anyone care?” Perspective customers will check a website, but that is usually static. What the perspective customer will be very interested in is the content on your LinkedIn page since there they will be able to find referrals, comments, likes, and connections to your employees. In a cyber-format, they can begin building that relationship with your company. That is why content is so important. Prospects want to see the type of work that your company is doing; case studies, testimonials, or referrals will paint a picture of what you will be able to deliver. It is also an opportunity to connect your company with suppliers and manufacturers, who will, again, validate the quality and expertise of your company.

Manufacturers, distributors, and technology providers are continually

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updating content and posting articles and information that can be shared to help educate customers and prospective customers. Think about sharing new technologies that will create interest for building owners. A great example is the ability to talk about aerial imagery and how that can help with property review and management. Commercial roofing involves a high degree of engineering and professionalism that can be shared via educational articles. This creates important questions that when asked by customers naturally lead them to your company. Posts that initiate questions about systems, technology, and services provided or used by your company begin to paint the picture your sales representatives need to close deals.

There are additional important uses for LinkedIn that include recruiting, marketing, announcements, and employees. Currently the most common use for LinkedIn in roofing

seems to be recruitment. Every day there are roofing companies posting job openings and reviewing LinkedIn for potential new employees. The benefit of this type of recruitment is that applicants usually bring some degree of technology savvy that is crucial to strong commercial roofing companies. The ability to understand how to use technology for sales, engineering, and customer relations is a must-have skill for the future.

Companies are also posting announcements, awards, and community involvement not to mention employee accomplishments including workday anniversaries, accomplishments, and awards. These types of content updates again paint a strong picture of a vital, well-connected company with long-term employees and customer retention. Community involvement opens other opportunities that increase networking potential as community members follow the company's social media.

A key for success with LinkedIn or any social media that needs to be embraced is blogging. In talking to a leading national commercial roofing organization, National Roofing Partners (NRP), they recently realized the importance of digital marketing and have actively been promoting business for their 120 member contractors across the country. "In working with our local community we realized how important content is for our organization and all of our members," stated Dale Tyler, president of NRP. "With leading commercial roofing companies across the country working with our joint NRP customers we wanted our social media to be strong, relevant, and informative."

NRP developed a blog (<http://nationalroofingpartners.com/blog/>) through a local digital marketing group whose sole purpose is to create content that will drive customers and prospective customers to NRP mem-

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bers' website and social media pages. "We are finding that our audience is young professionals working in procurement," continued Tyler. "Most of the time they are female, so we needed to understand how to communicate in a way that would gain their attention."

The blog posts have been informative and fun. They are giving all NRP members a chance to share on their own social media, driving prospects to the overall NRP website and social media pages along with the 120 contractors' websites and social media pages for local business. Tyler found that in addition to LinkedIn, Twitter was also creating opportunity.

"As I mentioned, we have been doing research to determine the audience or decision makers. We are finding the demographic for procurement is young, late 20s, tech-savvy, and female. We are developing our content to tell a story about why NRP is important for their organizations. We post updates to Twitter four times a week along with email every week and LinkedIn and Facebook updates weekly. The combination of the blog, email, and social media has made a difference," continued Tyler. "For example, just recently we had a 27-year-old woman in procurement for a worldwide Swedish-based electronics corporation contact us for roofing. We found out she was located in Dallas but she found us on Twitter."

This new generation of professionals is taking their place in business and they are bringing with them the use of social media not just for social use, but also for research. Commercial contractors need to take the time to get on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Google+ and determine what works for the company. As mentioned earlier, this is the place to expose your brand and company differentiation in a way that will bring in prospects. Being active on social media will bring positive results by not only educating customers but through building the strong online relationships needed to be successful in the commercial market.

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