

Contractor Marketing

“At the end of the day
the employees
are the voice
in the community.”

Social Selling

Using Social Media as a Sales & Marketing Tool

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



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Programs such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube have taken socialization to a whole new level. Where it used to be an occasional letter to or from Grandma, she is now watching your every post and usually liking them on Facebook or Pinterest, every day. As a society, we have made the shift from day-to-day interactions in person to communicating increasingly through mobile phones, text messages, and social media. As every good sales person knows, it is all about relationships. Getting to know customers and building a strong connection with them early on usually leads to a relationship throughout one's career, often turning into lifelong friendships. That type of networking is golden for sales. So how does one take the world of social media and utilize it as a strong sales and marketing tool for business? During a recent LinkedIn conference, I was introduced to their ongoing initiative of social selling. As an online business tool, LinkedIn has figured out how to create networks that are highly social and at

the tip of our fingers. Amazingly, LinkedIn has 313 million plus members worldwide and those members make over two billion updates weekly. This is a large network that has infinite possibilities. In fact, they promote that there are billions, yes billions, of professional relationships already established in their network. Yet, the question is, does this work for the contracting business?

The key is about earning the trust of the customer whether they are commercial building owners or individual homeowners. We are experiencing a paradigm shift where, as a society, we can quickly poll our contemporaries, whether business or personal, and receive rapid information and recommendations in return. In a study by Forrester Research, 70% of consumers trust brand recommendations from friends, but only 10% trust advertising.

When it comes to the large expense of a new roof, the natural behavior now is to reach out through research and social media and get recommendations. The sales or marketing representative for a roofing company wants to be on the front line of receiving those recommendations, but how does one do it?

The first and most important step is for sales and marketing to work together to create a strong presence not only for the company but for individuals on social media. A salesperson's LinkedIn page is no longer an online resume. It is a sales tool that should be used to create trust and confidence in their roofing expertise. Homeowners and building owners alike want to know that they are working with someone who has their best interests at heart, is an expert in what they do, and represents a professional company. Personally, think

about how many times neighbors or friends ask for recommendations for home improvement projects. When it comes to roofing or additional exterior remodeling, it is the contractor's name and company name that should come to mind.

It is also the ability to network that makes sites such as LinkedIn so powerful. Say that your company is working hard to gain the trust of a local property management team. One of the first steps taken by a good salesperson is prospecting. The first question asked should be: who are the decision makers? Another key question up front is: how are we already connected? By being committed to developing a strong network of local and regional business relationships in LinkedIn, along with being sure that all company employees are linked to each other, the sales team gains the ability to find current connections much easier.

LinkedIn offers upgrades for stronger networking and enterprise sales solutions but even with the free version, sales reps will be able to easily see if they have connections with the prospective property management team. By asking closer connections for a warm introduction, the cold call or cold email that everyone dreads has been bypassed. LinkedIn contends that by upgrading to business-level membership salespeople will receive eight times more warm introductions to prospects than are available with the free version.

It is much the same residentially; by asking friends to like your company on Facebook, suddenly there may be friends and recommendations that were otherwise not identified. One company that has caught my attention is Rainier View Construction and

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Roofing, Auburn, Washington. Owned by Tracey and Don Prociw, they have a great presence on Facebook both as a business and on a personal level. They post about current projects and additionally run some fun promotions. They also post about local networking and business opportunities including their involvement with the new local business publication, *425 Business*, Bellevue, Washington.

By working with the local business community and promoting trade publications and events, they have set the tone of being a mover and a shaker and someone to trust. Posting valid content about jobs, employees, and the community makes it easier for customers to relate. They post all this to their company page and also on their personal Facebook pages. The 425 area code knows they are there to provide the service their customers need and that they care about the community.

One emphasis of our sales and marketing efforts at EagleView Technologies is to know our customers. It is crucial that we not only keep our contractors aware of what is happening at EagleView - Pictometry®, but what is happening in technology overall for their businesses. We consistently share marketing ideas, including social media, with contractors who are using technology overall, whether social media, aerial measurements, estimating,

and/or CRM software. These are the leaders of tomorrow and they are closing business using those technologies. We want to be a part of this force that is changing our industry.

So how does this relate to marketing? It comes back to providing your sales team with the tools they need. It is not just about having the right connections on LinkedIn or Facebook, it is also about a sustainable campaign and content-sharing to keep the network up to date and to be relevant to what they care about. I am sure every person reading this column has received annoying emails, posts, or InMail messages from salespeople who are not connected and do not even understand the company's needs. The key is to not be one of those annoying telemarketers or spam e-mailers.

Marketing needs to provide strong and useful content that not only educates but also garners attention. One of my favorite posts recently came from Waukegan Roofing out of Waukegan, Illinois. Instead of Superfoods, Waukegan played off the trend and challenged readers to "Roofersfoods – Superfoods for your Roof." Stated in the post, "It got me thinking, what are the so-called Superfoods for your roof?" They go on to share the important elements for any high quality roof. Waukegan has several great posts that are targeted at home and building owners. Their posts grab attention whether it is Roofersfood or venting or coatings. They are posting articles that are fun and interesting for current and prospective customers. A key to success is that the marketing team works to make social media content not only interesting but also relevant and beyond that, searchable. As customers search for information on that new roof, contractors want their company to be first to come to mind and search due to past posts that were thought provoking and fun.

Often I see that contractors are only posting about the newest job or calling attention to their website. Even worse is when there is nothing. Contractors at that point are missing out on the social sale as well as missing out on positioning themselves, their team, and their company as the expert go-to roofing company for that customer's upcoming roofing needs.

So, take some time or hire someone to make sure that all social media pages are branded and updated with pertinent and interesting company and industry information. How does your page look? Empty? Fill it in a smart way, using blog posts from the company's website so that as new leads are driven through content placement, advertising, or community networking there is a place for interested customers to visit. A place where they will not only be impressed but will learn valuable information that forms smart questions for their next roofing project. Take the time and challenge the marketing and sales teams to explore and see what other roofing contractors are doing with social media and social selling. This is one area where a company does not want to be left behind.

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