

Sell Value and Stay Busy

Show prospective customers what makes
your decks worth the price

by Bayn Wood

Times are hard. Everybody with a hammer thinks he can build decks, the pool of clients is shrinking, and those consumers who are buying are very budget minded. This makes for fierce competition.

You can always try to be the cheapest bidder, but that strategy might strip you of profit and put you out of busi-

ness. Instead, I put together a strong sales approach that highlights my company's craftsmanship — how we design our decks as well as how we execute our joinery — and emphasizes the value of what we have to offer. Once your prospects connect craftsmanship with value, they'll see why your price is actually a good deal.

“Value Details”

Before you can sell something, you obviously need to know what it is you're selling. The saying is that the devil is in the details, but I believe that the details tell the real story, so I focus on developing and selling what I call “value details.” For instance, I include a tiered fascia detail as standard in all my decks. I also install a picture-frame border, even on cedar decks (most deck builders in my area limit picture frames to synthetic decking), and I use center seam boards on most projects more than 20 feet long. These value details

set me apart from other deck builders, and I make sure my prospects know it.

Be knowledgeable about different decking products and be ready to use them to suit clients' tastes. I mix different manufacturers' products in value details in order to hit a certain price point or to create a design feature.

Also offer multiple options — basic and upgraded designs for different budgets. On each bid, I give prices for a basic square design, a more angled design, and an upgraded triple picture-frame. And I apply this approach to my value details, too, even those that are relatively high-end. For example, to stay within budget, I've covered column bases with BellaStone (Crane; 800/366-8472, exteriorportfolio.com) rather than real or cultured stone.

There are many different value details you can offer your prospects. The challenge is to find unique ones that make your business stand out and don't add a lot to your costs.



Value details can be simple, like this tiered fascia consisting of a 1x8 with a 1x4 cap.

The Sales Call

On the sales call, I start by being professional. By that I mean I arrive on time, dressed neatly with laptop in hand and prepared to discuss my value details.

Since most prospective clients are looking for an honest company that does quality work, I try to win their trust with an honest, easy-going manner, instead of using pushy “If you sign today you’ll get our best deal” sales tactics. Ask questions and listen to the answers. Find out what is most important to the prospects, then help them understand, in detail, how the quality of your craftsmanship will achieve their goals for the project.

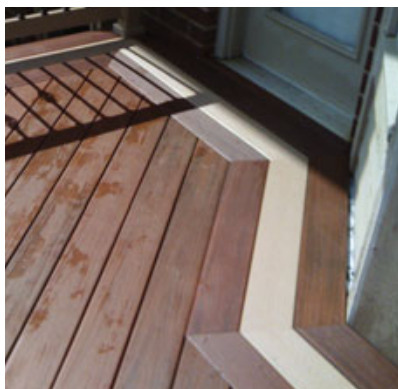
From your laptop, show the clients photos of previous jobs and highlight your value details. Back up your presentation with testimonials from past customers. Then use a deck design program to help customers visualize what their deck can look like.

Sell your company, not a product. We all have our favorite products, but I sell quality and craftsmanship over a specific kind of decking or railing. If you push just one product and the client wants something different, you probably won’t get the job. Remember, the value is in your quality craftsmanship, not in a particular product.

Detail Your Proposal

Clients want value for their purchase — remind them in the quote what you’re giving them. I explain every value detail in my quotes, and I try to include as many as possible with no extra charge.

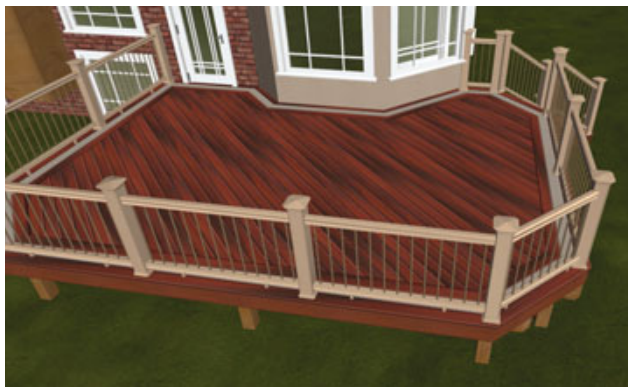
For example, I spell out that my company screws down all wood decking, installs hidden fasteners on all synthetic decks, and pocket-screws wood railings to posts instead of toenailing them. I point out that our standard baluster connectors are high-quality designer ones, and I make sure to note that the picture-frame border covers the fascia-frame joint, keeping out water and debris and minimizing rot. These are all



Blending products from different manufacturers widens your palette and provides cost options. This border is made with Fiberon Horizon and CorrectDeck CX (now GAF DuraLife Siesta).



Tailor upgrades to the customer. Substituting plastic-stone pergola bases for cultured stone saved money on this project.



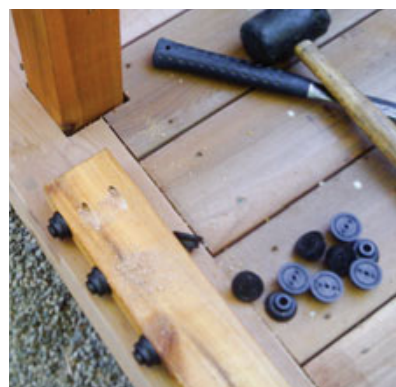
Deck design programs provide a great way to show clients your value details.

subtleties that a client likely wouldn’t remember without help, but clearly show the difference between your quote and the other guy’s.

Be a Pro in the Endgame

Professionalism means keeping a clean job site and being careful of your client’s home and yard. It means courteous customer service with regular meetings. It means polite, neatly dressed crews. Professionalism complements the value you give your clients and keeps you from getting the kind of reference that starts with “He did a great job, but ...” ❖

Bayn Wood is a deck builder in Rochester Hills, Mich.



Be sure to tell customers about hidden value details like high-quality baluster connectors.