

Partnering With Your Lumberyard on Social Media

by Rick Wedding

I work for McCabe Lumber Company in Cincinnati, supplying deck products to professional contractors. Like any other lumber supplier, I take care of my customers' basic needs by providing product knowledge, a comprehensive inventory, and dependable delivery. But to succeed, I need to somehow separate myself from the competition — do something that others don't, in order to be indispensable in the eyes of my customers. Turning that on its side, what could your supplier do for you to become a linchpin in your business?

My answer is to help my customers generate leads and make sales. We both benefit — they get more jobs and I sell more material. I do it by using a blog, social media, YouTube, and an email newsletter

to get leads and connect those buying a deck with those who can make that dream come true. This fills not only my sales pipeline, but also the pipelines of my deck-builder customers.

Blogging Gets Attention

I've branded myself as "The Building Supply Guy" and made it easy for customers to find me online. My personal website gets over 6,000 unique visitors per month and I attribute much of that traffic to blogging. Posting my customers' projects to my blog has become my number one method of getting them noticed. I've taught many customers how to blog, as well.

Blogging works because search engines love fresh content. Search-engine spiders

(little robots that scour the Web 24/7) get energized when they locate something new, especially if it's closely related to the words that are being searched by your customers.

One of my blogging success stories has been Thomas Decks, which started blogging with me in late 2011 and is on pace for a record year. In fact, they are so busy, they've been booking jobs for the spring of 2013 since early this fall. If you Google "Cincinnati decks," Thomas Decks will likely be on the first page of results.

Tweets, Posts, Links, and Pins

Social media is talked about every day, yet I'm not sure those of us in the building industry fully take advantage of sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and now Pinterest and Houzz (the last two sites are less well known, but worth checking out).

I have shown a few customers how to set up these sites, but I mainly do the promoting for them. I spent a lot of time this year growing my LinkedIn connections to over 1,100 people. The majority are connections that will help me and my deck customers. Realtors, landscapers, landscape architects, and home





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inspectors are all good sources for leads on new or resurfaced deck jobs.

How do I promote my customers to this audience and how do they get connected? Most of my customers have a camera phone. They snap a picture, and email or text it to me. My social networking is set up so I make one post that populates all of my accounts at once through an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) news feed. In layman's terms, my blog post is broadcast like a television show and the social networks are the television sets. Within a few minutes, I'm putting the photo and a short description of the project in front of thousands of people.

The effort is minimal, but this stuff works. By merely sharing photos, I've sold material to many jobs and connected many individuals. Does your supplier or sales rep participate in social media? Are they broadcasting your project photos to their contacts? If not, why not?

Web Video

I believe that video is increasingly going to become the main form of content online, especially because of smartphones and tablet computers. YouTube has been around since 2005, but I've just recently realized its huge potential as a lead resource for my customers. The first deck builder whose decks I put on YouTube is Adam Gregory of ABC Custom Decks. He says he never felt he had the time to do something like that himself — but he loves the results.

I use YouTube to highlight my customers' projects and testimonials from their clients. When you upload a video to YouTube, you're asked to provide three basic bits of information. First is the video title — I make this as specific as possible to the product and location. If the video is about a "TimberTech Evolutions Pacific Walnut Deck in Cincinnati," then that should be the title.

Next is the description. It should include the title of the video and other information that seems relevant. To help

fine-tune local search results, I add the builder's name and the neighborhood where the deck is located.

Finally, you'll need to provide keywords (YouTube calls them tags). I select words and phrases in the content of my video that people would most likely use when searching for the information I'm providing. Keywords should be separated by commas, like this: TimberTech Decking, Pacific walnut, Cincinnati deck builder, TimberTech Evolutions.

You can research the process by visiting YouTube and searching for information — just as your potential client would. Note what titles and descriptions are being used, and apply what you find out to your own videos.

Email Newsletters

Email newsletters are a good way to remind homeowners about deck builders and their services. I send occasional email updates with a special tip to my homeowner list. Topics such as *Getting Your Deck Ready for Spring*, *Deck Safety Checklist*, *Shutting Your Deck Down for the Season*, and *Favorite Grill Recipes* have worked well. Within the email, I also include the names of my deck-builder customers with links to their websites.

The results have been incredible. During a time when some businesses are experiencing lower sales and profits, my customers and I have been experiencing growth and prosperity.

Your Supplier

Consumers have more opportunities to become self-educated than ever before. Approach your supplier and encourage him or her to practice the strategies mentioned in this article. Together, you can build an audience of consumers that will look to you for their education on decking materials and construction. ♦

Rick Wedding runs buildingsupplyguy.com and a blog at ownyourzipcode.com that teaches building pros how to get noticed online.