



Old Fashion Service With High-Tech Flair

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People make the difference. Living in an instant information environment, salespeople who use technology will make the sale rather than the salesman who has a "be back with you" attitude. First, he must relate to the customer by listening to the concern. Only then can he find the solution. And, you may be surprised if you find the perfect solution in a timely manner, price may not be the most important factor. Pleasing the customer rates first; price is second.

As one who considers employees the greatest asset, I think we need to consider how to best use our human assets to gain a competitive edge. Yes, trends in design, color and even flooring products change, but an ever-constant factor is that of service.

Can a computer listen to a consumer's problems in remodeling a kitchen or basement and then present the best solution? No, but a good salesperson can, and then use a computer to find the right product. Can a big box figure a job and give a contractor a quote? Maybe. Yet, I know a contractor can talk to a distributor rep via cell phone and obtain the information on material cost to quote a job that may not install until next year.

Put simply, this is still a hands-on business that requires good people skills on the part of salespeople. More specifically, for a residential job where the customer requires a special order for a domestically produced product, all the salesperson has to do is to call his local distributor rep who goes to work by getting a commitment from the mill. In most cases the product is on the job in days.

Communication between retailer and distributor can be key also in dealing with unusual job conditions—even when only a mill's technician is capable of advising the retailer. In this case, a good distributor rep has given the dealer the manufacturer's 800 number, and who to call to deal with the special job condition. This communication between distributor and retailer could make the difference in coming up with the answer to closing a sale.

We also live in a "satisfy me now" society. The goal is to keep Mrs. Consumer in your store until a sale is consummated. How do you do that? Manufacturers say having the right display makes the difference. Buying groups tell you it is their packaging of products and your motivation from receiving rebates that makes the sale happen. As a distributor and consumer, I say it is the personal service the retail salesperson projects

to the consumer while listening and then presenting products and options that keep her in the store. Having a competitive price, attractive displays and a variety of quality products are all important, but the human element is what it takes to pull the sale together.

What high-tech tools do you have to aid in providing solutions for your consumers? First-hand knowledge of your products, warranty information, installation and maintenance requirements are given expectations. If you are not a walking floor covering encyclopedia, you need to have ready, quick reference points to aid you.

Today's educated consumer is not going to wait for you to start your research. She has already started her own research from manufacturer Web sites and expects you to be familiar with the data. Don't find yourself in the embarrassing situation of knowing less about products than she does. You will find that consumers will quickly find your door if that is the case. All the major

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manufacturers of each category display their offerings on Web sites, giving product specs with features and benefits.

Be ready for these savvy consumers who have done their research. Also, have available for viewing PowerPoint presentations that many mills offer on installation or job requirements, especially of Main Street products. Next, be linked to your suppliers by computer or cell. Timing is crucial for making that sale. Before she can "think about" her choice, be able to give an availability install date. For the "now generation," immediate information and availability makes the difference in making the sale.

Remember, many times the consumer is not in your store to shop price as much as to shop service. Don't let her walk out because your salesperson did not listen to her, give accurate product information, and then use high-tech tools to make the sale. It may just be that old fashion service is what makes the difference for making the sale in our fast-paced world.

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