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Human Faces

"Putting a Human Face on the Component Industry: How to Educate in Your Local Market" by Kirk Grundahl

The topic of education in local markets has been popular since WTCA began its efforts to "put a human face on the component industry." How to most effectively carry out this type of education via grassroots initiatives is a question we have been hearing a lot lately. The following are some concepts to keep in mind:

- Ask what the potential audience wants to learn about and provide that for them. Break out of your comfort zone by resisting the temptation to do only what you are comfortable with.
- Gear the presentation to what you are knowledgeable about, in the context of what the audience wants to learn. Talk about framing, building construction, component manufacturing, truss design, connection systems, etc. This will make the presentation easier for you and a great deal more fun.

It is usually very easy to relate an incident that has happened to you in your day-to-day working life that the group you're interacting with can relate to. By looking for these opportunities, you will find the common ground that will give everyone in the room a level of comfort.

- Give tours of your facility. What could be a better educational tool than sharing the real world of truss manufacturing with your community? Explain the responsibilities of the technical department as well as the design process, then move on to manufacturing, storage and shipping.
- Take the time to show the strength of truss plate joints, how hard it is to pull a plate out of the wood, and the overall strength of the truss when it is put together. Also demonstrate how easily trusses can bend laterally. Most people do not have a good feel for how easy a truss can bow around its weak axis. This will have a big impact.
- Give tours of your job sites.
- Show people how your product is turned into the completed structures. This makes it easy to show the strength of the completed truss when it is in place and that trusses are intended to carry vertical loads and do so quite successfully.
- Take a plan and show how the plan was turned into a completed truss and then the final structure.
- Show the key connection systems and how they work.
- Show the importance of top and bottom chord sheathing and bracing.
- Show problem areas and solutions.

All of this may seem too simple, but that is really the beauty of taking on the challenge of

promoting the industry through local education. It is simple and effective because you know these processes like the back of your hand. It is surprising what others do not know and your expertise builds credibility for the entire industry. Think of it this way: What are some of the most memorable and meaningful learning times in school? Field trips, right?

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