

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE (FORMERLY WOODWORDS)

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"Building with Components Makes Wood More Than Good" by Ken Cloyd

At WTCA's October 14 Open Quarterly Meeting in Milwaukee, Kelly McCloskey, Chairman of the Wood Promotion Network (formerly the "Wood Is Good" Campaign), provided the Association with a substantial overview of the planned three-year, \$45 million advertising campaign to promote wood as a superior building material that is natural and renewable. McCloskey's presentation generated a lengthy discussion among those in attendance, revealing a variety of opinions as to the appropriate target for the campaign and the appropriate size of the effort.

As an association of manufacturers that produce, by and large, engineered wood components, we do possess a legitimate interest in ensuring the availability and affordability of lumber as a raw material in the short- and long-term future. It's not that we don't believe the Wood Promotion Network's heart is in the right place. It's not that we don't think education and raised awareness are necessary. But before millions of dollars are spent on this effort, the question of who is the appropriate target audience does need to be carefully considered.

WOOD ISN'T WHAT'S FOR DINNER

Granted, this kind of campaign worked wonders for the milk, beef and pork industries—and steel, plastic and cotton seem to think that it's the way to go as well. However, the reason this type of marketing worked for milk, beef and pork has a lot more to do with the nature of these products. They are products people consider on a daily basis because they have a need for food every day.

Building a house is not an issue people consider as often as they think about making dinner. It's an infinitely bigger investment of both time and money. There are many more unknown variables and uncertainties surrounding the decisions that need to be made. When it comes to building a house, people are most likely to rely on the guidance of those who know what they are doing to help them through the home-building process. And who are the people who are guiding these consumers? None other than the architects, engineers and builders who are designing the buildings these consumers are buying—the same people that specify and purchase structural building components from manufacturers in our industry, and our association, every day.

EDUCATION IS THE ANSWER

In the last few years, WTCA has made a serious commitment to educating this group of people to further the industry and the use of components across the country. We are working to teach architects, engineers and builders that, not only are components a desirable choice because they provide solutions for contemporary construction problems (e.g. labor shortages, time constraints, etc.), but that components are also the most economical solution for all buildings. We are teaching these individuals how to provide their customers with more value for their

investment—and that's the kind of message today's consumers like to hear. The best proof is the fact that components are used in the majority of the markets in the U.S. That means that every year, approximately 1.2 million families have trusted the advice of an architect, engineer or builder to use engineered wood components in the construction of their house. Whoever said that money doesn't talk!

IT'S EASY BEING "GREEN"

Now I understand that economics is not the only side of this issue—the environmental factor does play a role as the lumber industry is taking some heat from environmental groups and other raw material industries. But we all know that lumber is the only natural, renewable building material we have to work with, and we know the benefit that well-maintained forests have on the environment. The key here is that we know these facts, but do our specifiers? Are these facts part of the message that architects, engineers and builders tell their customers when they explain the other benefits of using engineered components in home-building? When they are added to the economic benefits of using components, the environmental benefits of using wood components in particular is the icing on the cake.

As component manufacturers who would like to see the lumber industry get more involved in our educational efforts, it is up to us to communicate with our lumber suppliers and get them to understand our commitment to education as well as the positive results it has produced. What's more, they need to understand how much more powerful this education could be if we had the tools to include the environmental message to these groups. We need to get our suppliers to understand our need to more powerfully inform architects, engineers and builders that the product we manufacture provides the most economical and environmentally-friendly way to build America's houses.

FEEDING YOUR ADVOCATES

The point is that the structural building component industry—and members of WTCA in particular—are the lumber industry's best advocates for communicating and demonstrating how good wood is. We have already established relationships with the people who will be the most influential in swaying the average consumer when it comes to what products are used in the home-building process. We need to express our need for support from our local suppliers to educate our specifiers, and we need to back it up with a commitment to support only those vendors that support our educational initiatives and make an effort to help us improve them.

I'm not saying that "Wood Is Good" is all bad—it certainly has its place in our consumer-driven society. But we need to make sure that we are targeting a more focused group who have influence in the decision-making process—in this case, the specifiers and builders. For example, as a consumer, I might love the ad campaign for Wonder Widgets—it might be the cleverest piece of marketing I've ever experienced. However, if I were to find out from someone who regularly uses Clever Cogs, a competing product, and believes it's the most reliable and economical solution for my need, I'm not even going to be able to remember the jingle for Wonder Widgets. If I then find out that Clever Cogs are made from a renewable resource that helps keep the air clean, that's going to be the icing on the cake—I'll have money left in my pocket and more clean air to breathe.

LET THEM EAT CAKE

What the lumber industry needs to keep in mind as it invests in the initiatives of the Wood Promotion Network is that there are already relationships in place through which their message can be communicated. Specifiers are already choosing engineered components because they are the economic solution to their building needs. Adding the environmental benefits of using wood components to this equation is the icing on the cake.

Maybe the investment needs to be made in baking more cakes. A bowl of icing doesn't do anyone very much good all by itself—too much sweet, fluffy stuff without any substance.

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