



Build Strong Relationships

Preparing for D-Day

by Sean D. Shields

Get to know your lawmakers!

November 4, 2008. It seems really far away, doesn't it? For you and me, it's practically a year away. For Congressional Republicans and Democrats, and a handful of national Presidential hopefuls, that day might as well be tomorrow. For these 500 or so individuals, and the mighty political machine pushing behind them, November 4th is D-Day. Decision Day. The day when our nation will choose our next President, 34 U.S. Senators and 435 U.S. Representatives, and very likely the control and direction of the Federal Government going forward.

It's that "control" part that has all of them so worked up, and is the major reason why most pundits are predicting that 2008 will be a year where Congress and the Bush Administration will agree (or disagree) to do nothing substantial. Neither Republicans nor Democrats want to give the other side anything they can use to promote their candidates or convince voters their political party should be entrusted with control of the national agenda.

So as a component manufacturer, how can you effectively build relationships with your lawmakers in this political climate? What do you talk about when their political parties' leaders are bent on making sure nothing substantial happens? The good news is that in 2008 there are even more opportunities for you to work on building a relationship with them, and still plenty to talk about.

"Hello. Hi. How Are You?"

As you already know, the single most important factor in building a relationship with someone is having repeated contact with that person. Over the next year, you have quite a few options you can take advantage of to make sure you have repeated contact with your lawmakers.

First, there is the winter Congressional recess that begins sometime in November, and will likely run until January, barring any last minute wrangling on legislation or political controversies. During this time, lawmakers return to their Congressional districts and will plan on doing two things: meeting with their constituents (that's you!) and raising money for their reelection campaigns.

Several component manufacturers have taken advantage of these opportunities to meet with their Congressmen in their district offices. As Glenn McClendon (Sun State Components) states, "It's well worth the effort!"

Second, there is the annual SBC Legislative Conference, scheduled for May 3-5, 2008. This will be a great chance to visit Washington, DC and meet with your lawmakers again (as a follow up to your winter meeting with them in their district office). This conference is always well attended, and allows you to walk through the hallowed halls of Congress and meet your lawmakers in their impressive offices while they're hammering out compromises on pending legislation.

As a regular participant, Joe Kannapell (MiTek), says, "The Legislative Conference is about being active in government, not just complaining about it. It's about realizing that a democracy requires citizen involvement. That's why we come here." Traveling all the way to DC and participating in the conference also conveys the message to

your lawmaker that you are committed to building a relationship with them.

Third, you have a powerful tool at your disposal that can go a long way toward cementing a strong relationship with your lawmaker: your production facility. It gives you time to show your elected officials pristine bundles of 2x4s, rows of busy component saws, gantry tables, roller presses and enough stacks of freshly built trusses to make their head spin. It also makes your lawmaker a captive audience for the hour it takes to give the tour. This is more than enough time to distinguish yourself from their many other constituents.

Congressman Donald Manzullo (R-IL) echoed this point when he said, "Ultimately, you can show them the process of turning raw materials into finished goods. As a lawmaker who has toured numerous plants across the country, and around the world, that is the magic that sticks in my mind. To this day, I can vividly remember the plant tours I have taken, and how I marveled at the ingenuity behind how things are made."

Finally, there will be a myriad of political campaign events going on in your area as your lawmakers seek re-election. This is the other side of the political process, democratic elections,



In 2006, Congressman Manzullo (right) visited Atlas Components in Rockford, IL. Owner Mike Karceski (left) is a long-time Legislative Conference attendee and has been building a relationship with Manzullo since his first visit to D.C. in 2002.

and is yet another valuable opportunity to meet and interact with your current—or future—lawmakers. It is certainly not necessary, but contributing money and/or your own time to their election campaigns can also make a powerful statement about your desire to build an ongoing relationship with them.

"What I'd Like to Say Is..."

So, let's say you have the opportunity to meet with your lawmaker, what do you do? Assuming that 2008 is indeed the "do nothing" year experts are predicting, what do you talk about? Relax, it's straightforward and simple.

The most important thing to remember when you meet with your lawmaker is be yourself. Even though in their official role as an elected representative, lawmakers may be confident or even arrogant, you will be served best by doing what you do best: being genuine. Not only will your message seem more sincere, but it is more likely they will remember and trust you and your opinion.

Don't worry about the issues, talk about what you know. You may own and run a business, manage a business or work tirelessly to improve the products and reputation of a business.

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at a glance

- You have a powerful tool at your disposal that can go a long way towards cementing a strong relationship with your lawmaker: your production facility.
- You have nothing to lose—start building these relationships today!

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Whichever the case, you know a great deal about the problems and issues your company faces: cost of materials; workforce quality and ability to provide health care coverage; adequate risk management and affordable insurance premiums; accounting, taxation and IRS reporting requirements. Government can provide relief in almost every case, if effectively persuaded to do so. Don't hesitate to talk about what you do, what your company produces, and what issues you specifically face.

After the lawmaker knows who you are, what your company does, and some of the issues you face, you can always talk about some industry-wide issues. WTCA is here to help you in that endeavor. In many instances, on issues like immigration, health care, workforce development or trade, talking points have been developed for you to use. Talking points are just that, brief statements that can provide either pertinent facts or concise arguments you can use to help you talk about a given topic.

It's also a good idea to do a little research of your own. Before your meeting, you should poke around your lawmaker's website and see what issues interest them. Not only can you get a good glimpse into what issues they're devoting their efforts



Plant tours are a perfect opportunity for lawmakers to better understand our industry by seeing an operation firsthand. In 2006, Frank Klinger, President of Valley Truss & Door, hosted a tour for Congressman Solomon Ortiz. Klinger appreciated the opportunity to have the lawmaker's undivided attention on his own turf.

ing our nation. They have the power and ability to have a significant impact on your operations and the environment in which you transact business. Building that relationship today will give you a leg up when you need their consideration and assistance in the future. **SBC**

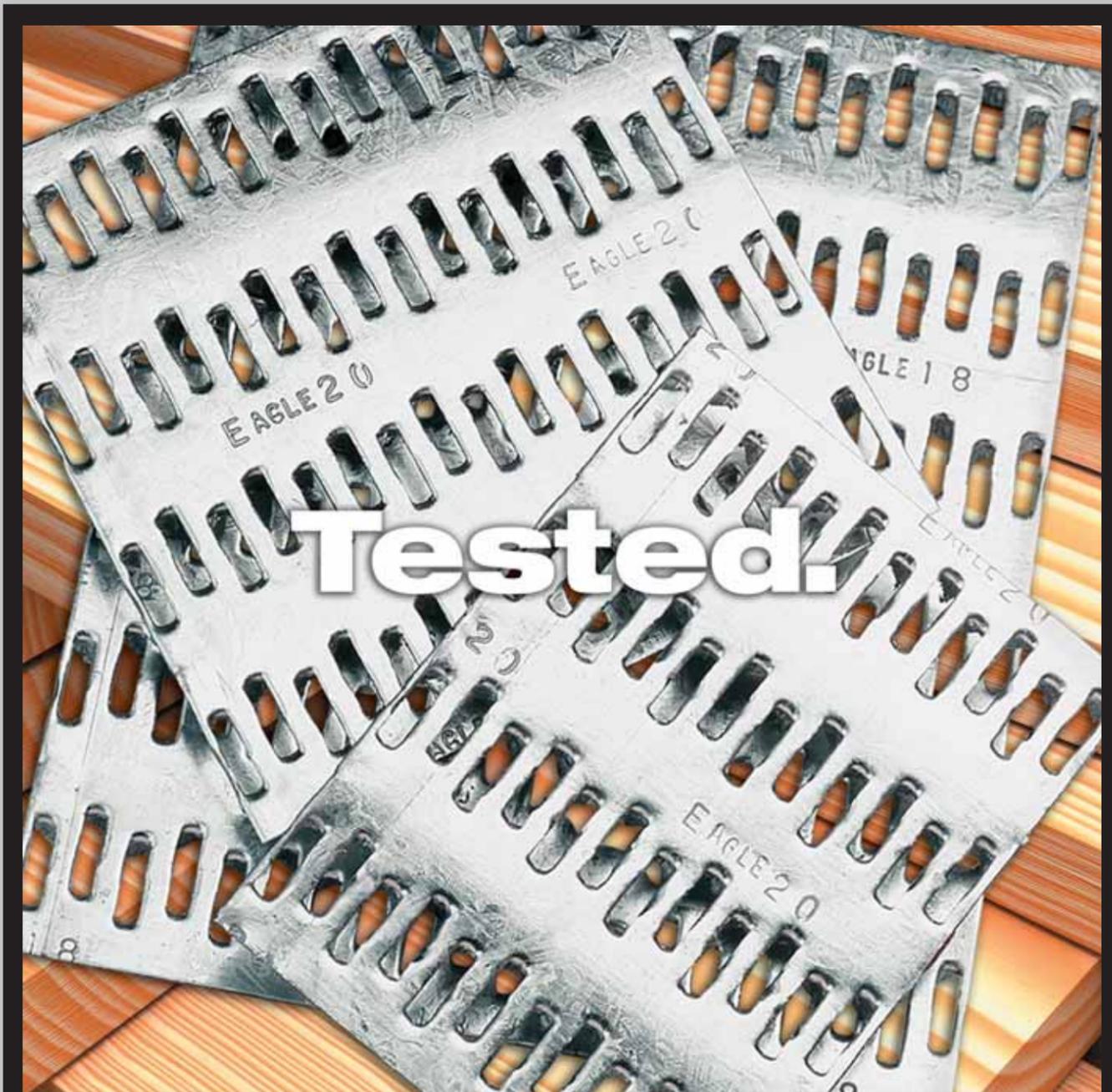
Building Relationships in 2008

- Make repeated contact.
- Attend the Legislative Conference.
- Organize a plant tour.
- Contribute or volunteer.

toward, but you can usually find their biography there so you know their background. You would be surprised at how many members of Congress are former business owners, or have ties to manufacturing and construction.

Finally, when meeting with your lawmaker, try to be as brief as possible. This is different than being in a hurry. Don't skip on sharing vital information about yourself, your business, or the issues and perspectives you want to share with them. What this means is that lawmakers are BUSY people, and, for that matter, so are you. Everyone will benefit from a meeting that is just as long as it needs to be. That's why talking about yourself and using talking points to discuss everything else makes common sense.

You have nothing to lose—start building these relationships today! Rest assured that after next November, these lawmakers will once again return their focus to the pressing issues facing our nation. They have the power and ability to have a significant impact on your operations and the environment in which you transact business. Building that relationship today will give you a leg up when you need their consideration and assistance in the future. **SBC**



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