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High-Definition Residential Marketing

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High-Definition Residential Marketing

by Christopher K. King



When residential contractors talk shop, they don't often go very long without discussing ways to land new business. Technical innovations are always exciting, but without a healthy sales program, there are no jobsites to try out new products and application methods. The importance of marketing is not lost on today's contractor, but most will admit that word-of-mouth advertising is an essential component of their marketing effort.

Business owners realize that a job well done can be the most valuable testament to a contractor's quality workmanship. A new roof that turns heads can be a billboard more effective than any advertisement, one that's visible to everyone who drives through the neighborhood.

The striking look of today's residential roofing products can be an integral component in the quest for new business. A shingle that turns heads can help sell itself, and a homeowner singing the praises of a contractor and the product he installed is the best of both worlds. We spoke with three roofing contractors whose experience has shown them that the unique look of today's large-exposure, high-profile shingles can boost sales when complemented by quality installation procedures, solid marketing programs, and professional customer service.

Products That Turn Heads

Ken Kelly is the president of Kelly Roofing in Naples, Fla. The company, which was founded in 1972 by Ken's father, Joe Kelly Sr., now has 70 employees. Seventy percent of its business is residential; the company does no new construction work.

"We're a sales-oriented company that invests heavily in sales and marketing," says Kelly. "We try to create value. We don't get into a price war with other companies." He notes the key to creating value is in upgrades, "and the biggest upgrade is in the shingle."

The company deals exclusively in larger-exposure shingles and designer shingles. In fact, the base shingle the company quotes is the Prestique® Grandé from Elk Premium Building Products. Introduced in 2003, these high-definition shingles feature an 8¼-inch exposure instead of the 5- or 6-inch exposure of traditional laminated shingles. Kelly also offers Elk's Domain® Winslow®, which features a distinct random pattern and wood-shake look.

Both shingles are constructed with the manufacturer's exclusive VersaShield® XP™, a non-asphaltic headlap, allowing the manufacturer to concentrate the asphalt and granules in the exposed part of the shingle while conserving asphalt and granules in areas ultimately covered up during



Kelly Roofing deals exclusively in larger-exposure shingles such as Elk's Prestique Grandé.

installation. The VersaShield XP technology reduces overall weight, making bundles easier to handle, while the larger shingle size can reduce overall shingle application time by as much as 20 percent, according to the manufacturer. The combination of the non-asphaltic headlap with a large-exposure laminated shingle is referred to by the manufacturer as a hybrid shingle.

"The Grandé provides the premium heavyweight look at a value price," says Kelly. "People feel they are getting more value for their money."

He notes that both products are classified in accordance with ASTM D3426 and are Metro Dade approved.

Kelly asserts that the look of the product alone has boosted sales at his company. "When I put a Grandé roof in a neighborhood, I get five people who come up to me and ask me to put that shingle on their house," he says. "They might not even need a new roof — they just want that shingle."

John McNamara of J.Mac Roofing, Akron, Ohio, has experienced the same reaction from passers-by. McNamara and his brother Jim founded the company in 2001, but he has been in the industry since 1973, when he began working for his father's company.

"The dimensional shingles that have been around for 20 years are now run of the mill," he says. "Homeowners want something different, and these larger exposure shingles give them something that's beautiful and different."

"I don't even show customers a three-tab shingle anymore unless they're looking to match an existing roof for an addition."



Above: Superintendent Wes Fields (left) and owner Kenneth Kozlovsky of Bent Tree Roof Co.
Left: Ben Hernandez of Bent Tree Roof Co. installs Ridglass and Domain Winslow shingles.



Workers for Kelly Roofing have found that larger-exposure shingles cut down on installation time.

Efficient Installation

Kenneth Kozlovsky is the owner of Bent Tree Roof Co. in Garland, Texas, an 11-year-old company with 29 employees that does 99 percent of its work in the residential market. He points out that the larger surface area of the hybrid shingles means fewer courses of shingles for each job, saving time and cutting down labor costs. In an era of cut-throat competition, efficient installation procedures can be critical.

"In some areas, roofing contractors are being paid what they were paid 10 years ago," said Kozlovsky. "Any product that saves time is No. 1 in my book. The hybrid shingles can save time, but we actually charge more because I believe it is a specialty product."

He has three words of advice when it comes to installation procedures: "Quality, quality, quality."

"Make sure every installer understands the procedures," he urges. "This means training. Do it right the first time. Callbacks are expensive and can cost you referrals."

Kelly noted that installers appreciate the lighter weight of the hybrid products, and the headlap takes very little time to get used to; when you pull out a shingle, "the lap flaps up" if you use the proper technique, and the edge makes it easy to

line up the next course. "They're easier to install," says Kelly of the hybrid products. "There are fewer shingles per square, and guys love it because it's so fast."

The installer uses six nails, or sometimes even a seventh nail, says Kelly, noting that there are 13 fewer shingles per square, "so you use fewer fasteners, even if you use the seventh nail."

The hybrid products feature a wider nailing area, with a 1½-inch target range. "The wider nail area does help," says Kelly. "A ½-inch line can be totally obscured by the head of the nail gun. The wider nailing area means more room for error."

Increasing Sales

These contractors point to a quality installation as the cornerstone of new business and customer referrals, but none of them is content to let their companies' marketing efforts stop there.

"Don't put all of your eggs in one basket," advises Kelly. His company's diverse approach to marketing uses individual mailers, which are targeted to specific neighborhoods. "Sometimes you can't mail to entire towns because it would cost a fortune," he notes, so sometimes a group of employees will check out a neighborhood, driving through an area where the company has done some work in the past and pinpointing specific houses that look like they might need a new roof in the near future.

The company advertises in the Yellow Pages and uses television commercials, taking advantage of co-op advertising money offered by the manufacturer. Kelly uses yard signs that are disposable, so he can leave them with homeowners, but he doesn't go out of his way to tell them that he won't be back for the sign. Customers tend to leave them up for a longer period of time if you don't mention it, and if they call the company to ask about the sign, he thanks them and tells them to just throw it away.

He makes sure vehicles "are plastered" with logos and signage. "Sometimes just maintaining a presence is enough," says Kelly, arguing that people might not remember where they saw your name, but if they turn to the Yellow Pages



Ken Kelly makes sure the company's vehicles function as rolling billboards.

and see your name and logo, it can flip that crucial switch.

McNamara calls his company's marketing methods "old-fashioned but successful." He recently scaled back his Yellow Pages ad, and he uses tried-and-true methods including yard signs and vehicle signage. But the use of a canvasser has provided the company's best source of leads. When the company is at work in a subdivision, a sales representative scours the neighborhood, making door-to-door sales calls and leaving door hangers on homes. It sounds simple, but McNamara believes a knock on the door and a business card from his canvasser can be the most effective marketing tools.

"If other contractors knew how well it worked, he wouldn't be the only one out there," he says.

Educating the Consumer

"Our best customers are the ones that we educate," says Kozlovsky. "Many do not know how important a quality installation is, and they are not aware of the types of products that are available. Upselling makes you extra money and gives the homeowner things he didn't know he wanted — whether it was for a better quality roof or a better looking roof."

"Manufacturers are very important when it comes to roofing products. The

knowledge we can get from them is worth its weight in gold. They can help with unusual installations, as well as product information, and their Web sites help educate the consumer."

Kelly also points to the growing role of the Internet in the decision-making process of most homeowners. "On most major purchasing decisions, the consumer can locate information in seconds." The key, according to Kelly, is helping consumers find the information that they need — and find it easily.

Online resources can be bolstered at the point of sale with brochures, pictures, samples and literature to help contractors explain the products and installation processes to the customer. "It helps you educate the homeowner about elements like flashing and underlayments that they might not be familiar with," says Kelly. "The educated customer makes the best decision."

And price is not always the key to the sale, Kelly insists: value is essential. In the end, the person is likely to conclude that "the company that is best for the job is the one that was the most helpful during the decision-making process."

Backing Up the Job

Another area where the manufacturer can assist a contractor is with a solid war-

ranty program. The Prestique Grandé shingle carries a 40-year limited warranty and up to a 90 mph limited wind warranty with a six-nail application technique, while the Domain Winslow has a 50-year limited warranty and a limited wind warranty up to 110 mph with the same nail application as the Prestique Grandé.

J.Mac is an Elk Peak Performance™ contractor, allowing the company to offer "substantial warranty upgrades for a nominal amount." MacNamara offers a 30-year non-prorated warranty on the shingle with a warranty upgrade program that also fully covers labor and material costs for 15 years, including tear-off. After 15 years, labor is prorated. "It's probably the best warranty out there," he says, noting that the manufacturer compensates his company for every sale, sometimes allowing him to throw the upgrade in at no charge to the customer as an added perk.

Kelly, another Peak Performance contractor, pointed to the warranty upgrade program as the clincher on many sales calls. The cost: \$150, says Kelly, "which, when you're talking about a \$10,000 investment, is a drop in the bucket."

A solid warranty, quality products, and expert installation are all integral parts of the residential contracting process, and all elements are focused on the same goal: creating a satisfied customer. And everyone knows that a satisfied customer can be the greatest source of sales leads.

"Ninety-nine percent of our business comes from referrals," says Kozlovsky, so he makes sure to follow up after the installation is completed to make sure the customer is satisfied. "We send a thank you letter with the warranty and reward referrals with a \$25 gift certificate."

"Our customers are happy to refer their friends, neighbors, and family to us because it makes them look good," says Kelly. "We try to be the most professional company in the service industry. Customers know they can refer us without hesitation because we promise to treat everyone as if they were part of our family." ■

Christopher K. King is editor of Roofing Contractor.



Jim McNamara (left) and John McNamara founded J.Mac Roofing in Akron, Ohio, in 2001.