



It's A Dog Eat Dog World Out There (Yummy!)

Sales are one of the most competitive type of professions there is. Just like the professional athlete, my company's product competes against the other company's product that does what my product does. When a consumer walks into a retail outlet and is looking to purchase a paint remover product, my job is make sure that my company's product is the one they will walk out with. It is my job to make sure that retailer has as many of my products and as few of my competitors' products as possible available on his shelves. And of course, my competitors feel the same way about their wares.

I am so focused on my objective, that at the time of my presentation to my potential or existing appointment, like a professional athlete, I psych myself up just prior to the call. I envision my enemies (other brands) with their factories blowing up, their products burning up on shelves, their salespeople completely tongue tied (but otherwise living a long and healthy life), every one of their past customers completely dissatisfied and demanding a better choice. Maybe I get a little carried away, but it works for me. I really don't wish any bad will on anyone; I just wish they had better luck some where else.

With that in mind, you might think that the men and women who represent the different companies hate or at least don't like each other. You might think we glare at each other at contractor shows as we scan

the other booths which are set up to 'steal' our loyal contractors.

For the most part, that is simply not true. Mostly, we all like each other and in many cases we have worked together in the past. Often, we socialize with each other, share personal experiences and develop close friendships. We participate in each other's joys and problems. We help each other with personal and professional growth. While we certainly want our products sold and in the case where they are direct competitors, we want ours sold over theirs, we still do not wish ill on them. Like professional athletes after the game, we shake hands and go to the bar and buy each other a drink, laugh, and enjoy the friendship of good people.

With that in mind, I have not seen that same sort of thing with many retailers. Of course my knowledge may be incidental, but after many distributor shows, I have not seen too many retailers 'hanging out' with each other. They seem to be polite to each other, but when I am one on one with a retailer they complain about each other and rarely have a good word to say about the other retailers in their area.

My company is a vendor to both ALLPRO and Mid-South. Having just returned from back to back shows with both of them and having had the opportunity of some good quality time to think about the events of the last

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two weeks courtesy of the airlines, I reflected on a unique and refreshing observation. In both groups, the members were not local competitors. Many were regional competitors, and they really liked each other. They socialized with each other, they played golf with each other, and they hung out together. They shared success stories and failures. At the ALLPRO and Mid-South shows, many brought their families and their families did things together. While this may not seem odd to you, remember, many of them are regional competitors and their personal incomes often depend on them 'getting the business' over the other guy. But at least here, it didn't seem to matter. They genuinely liked each other and tried to help one another. The Allpro and Mid-South members actually tried to help each other grow their respective businesses.

As I was working at my booth at the ALLPRO show, quite a few members came to me and said, "I was talking to another member who told me how successful he was with your products and your program. I'd like to bring in your line." As a vendor, I was thrilled. Testimonials are great, but not too often will the testimonial send another potential customer who may also be a regional competitor to that testimonial. One dealer told me he had brought some of our products in through

distribution and was selling it and now wanted to bring in the rest of the line. Of course in talking to my boss, I took full credit for working my butt off to get the account.

Music to manufacturer's ears, but not the point I am trying to bring across. Instead of two regional competitors trying to get the other guy's business, here were two regional competitors helping each other out. Instead of them trying to undercut the other guy's price, they were working together to build a strong network of independent paint stores that are strong enough to compete against the discounter and the big box store. Both of them realized that while they do share some customers, each of the customers buys from them for many different reasons, whether it be because of personal relationships, pricings, credit, variety of different merchandise selection, or simply just because they are working closer to one location over the other.

Both of them realized that if the other were to go out of business, they would potentially double their profits. The greater likelihood would be, however, that the contractor would end up taking his business to the big box store. All of us know that a strong independent retailer is good for business and that's what motivates regional competitor cooperation.

Chas Wolfson represents the Rock Miracle brand for Samax, Inc. He knows everything you'd ever want to know about restoration, paint stripping and deck preservation. His articles and observations about the industry are informative and funny, and he manages to bring a lighthearted touch to the heavy duty world of restoration. You can find his articles in various publications to the trade.